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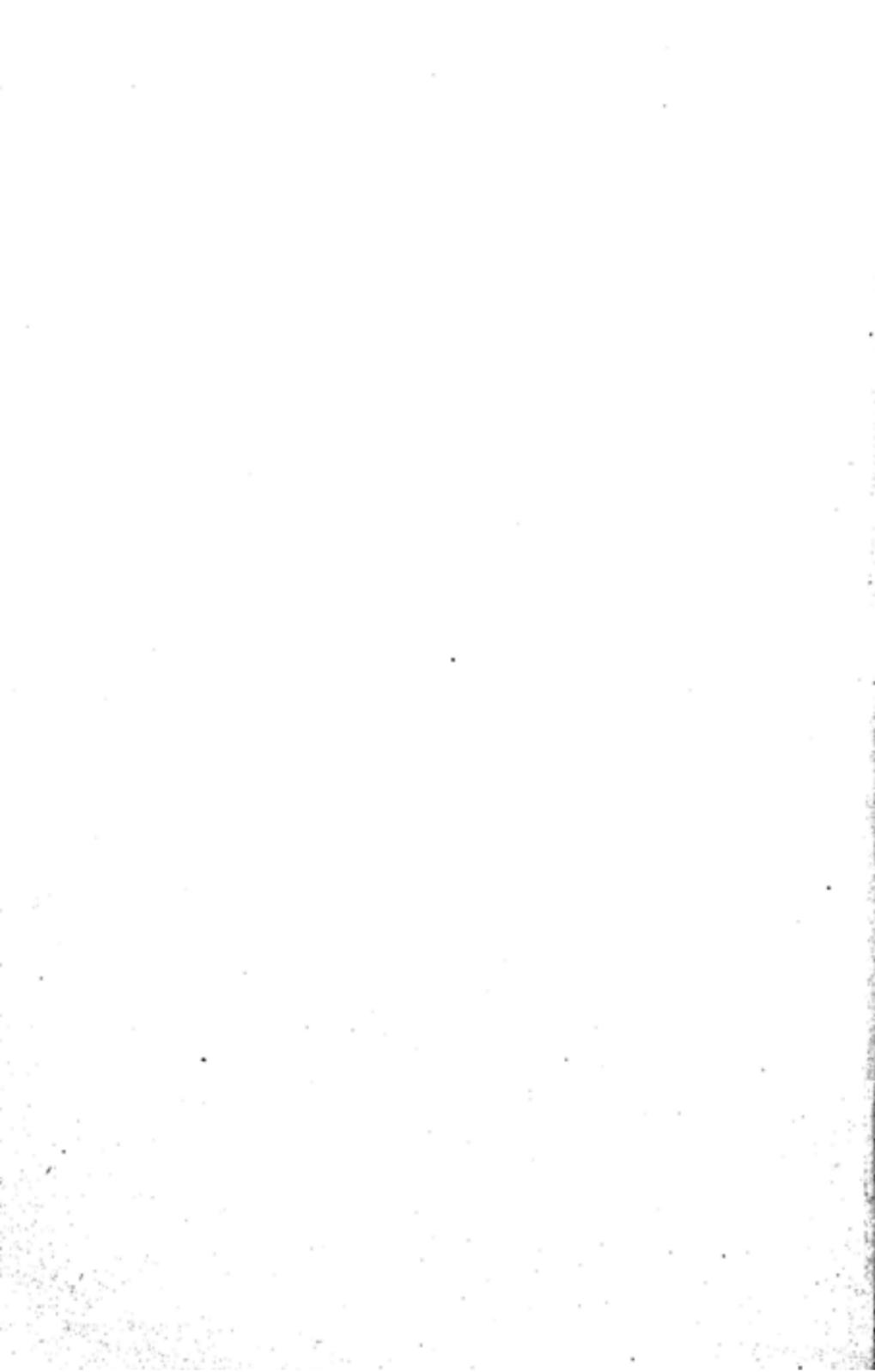
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ASSISTANCE TO READERS IN LENDING LIBRARIES



ASSISTANCE TO READERS IN LENDING LIBRARIES

By

D. J. EQSKETT
B.A., F.L.A.

*Information Officer
The Metal Box Co. Ltd.*

2646

"When anie man cometh, and wotteth not
what he wold have; then he shall tell him,
and doe him to understande his besynesse
for him."

*Item VIII. DR. MAITLAND'S
Lawes for the Keeper of the Bookes*



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LONDON, E.C.4

First published 1952

CELESTINE GIGAL

118, AVON, NEWCASTLE.

Acc. No. 2946.

Date 3. 6. 55

Call No. 025-5/Fox

Printed in Great Britain at the St Ann's Press, Park Road, Altrincham

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PREFACE

I SUPPOSE that no author, having completed a book, is satisfied on re-reading the draft, and I am very conscious of the imperfections of this one. But the process of giving way to the urge to modify and improve tends to become continuous, never reaching completion; and the need for some such statement regarding reference service in lending libraries, or readers' advisory service as it is often called, seems to me to be of such urgency as to warrant my venturing to take the risk and put it forth as it is.

The literature of English librarianship has in the main been descriptive rather than analytical, and I have tried to avoid this in the first and most important part of the book. The result, of course, is that it is bound to reflect a personal point of view, with which many may disagree. If I can stimulate controversy and in the end be proved wrong, I shall be satisfied. For this reason, I have written so to speak contemporaneously, anticipating that reference service will develop so rapidly as to render this book obsolete within a few years.

The organisation described in the second half, therefore, does not fully measure up to the implications of my analysis. To do so would require a new approach to library planning which under present circumstances is not likely to receive encouragement. For the *average* public library, with which I am most concerned, it is a waste of books, staff and building to try to maintain a

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separate "reference library" which is often no more than a glorified quick reference collection. But it could not be abolished without some sort of replacement, by large regional collections, perhaps, and of this we see no sign whatever. The descriptive part of the book suggests an organisation which will acknowledge all the implications but which can without difficulty or too great a cost be installed in an existing service.

Most of the book has grown out of discussions with Mr. A. J. Wells of the *British National Bibliography*, without whose neverfailing help and encouragement it would not have been written. I am also grateful to Messrs. B. I. Palmer and W. B. Paton for criticism and advice, and to Mr. E. J. L. Brice for most of the examples in Appendix II.

D. J. FOSKETT

January, 1952

CHAPTER I

THE GROWTH OF THE PUBLIC LIBRARY TRADITION

THE ORGANISATION and practice of public libraries are the result of a tradition inspired, in its beginnings, by conditions which no longer exist, and in order to understand its implications, it is necessary to examine the movement which led to the passing of the first Public Libraries Act in 1850. This has already been done in some detail by James Wellard,¹ who concludes from the evidence presented to the Royal Commission that there was in actual fact no popular demand for public libraries, in the sense that a library is a repository of knowledge. He points out that many of the labouring classes were unable to read, and that a good deal of the evidence was framed to show that libraries were to be desired on moral grounds—that the lower classes were in need of a civilising influence to raise their standards of behaviour. These conclusions have been challenged by E. A. Savage,² who asserts that even the lowest stratum of the public enjoyed its reading, adducing as evidence the spread of popular enlightenment through such media as the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, as well as the obvious example of the Mechanics' Institutions founded in 1824 by Birkbeck.

¹ *Book Selection*, Grafton, 1937.

² *Special Librarianship*, Grafton, 1939.

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It appears, then, that the study of the early history of the movement can give rise to conflicting conclusions, which would indicate that there is room for further research to try to establish the correct deductions which can be made from the facts. There is one aspect of the early years, however, that does not appear to have been given the attention it deserves. This is the relation of the spread of knowledge to the historical needs of the time, in the development of society. If this is understood, it can be shown that the evidence of these two authorities is not contradictory, and that in fact the development of the public library was precisely along the lines to be expected.

It was, of course, no accident that the Mechanics' Institutions came into being during the early part of the last century. The Industrial Revolution was sweeping forward, replacing traditional skills handed down from craftsman father to craftsman son by the use of new machinery, which could produce much faster for the rapidly expanding markets overseas. After the Napoleonic War, Britain was supreme in the political sphere, and the products of her inventive genius could be protected, if necessary, by diplomatic means. Trade, in fact, followed the flag. To meet the requirements of these enormous markets required an output very much greater than could be obtained by handcraft methods. There was therefore a great demand for inventions, and in order that the maximum use could be made of them, there arose the need for a technically educated artisan class. The operators of the first machines had no one to whom they could turn for instruction, and they were therefore obliged to establish libraries, in answer to a definite need for instruction, and because they could not organise the

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meagre supply of technical books and lectures without them. "The artisan, who saw wonderful mechanical inventions enabling him to perform his operations with undreamt ease and efficiency, or depriving him of his job, was roused to an intense interest in science and a desperate desire to fit himself for a place in the new industrial order".³ Such a development has its parallel in our day, in the rise of research libraries in industry, which have often begun as a handful of books brought to their place of work by the scientists because it was more convenient to have them there, and growing because it was found that new knowledge cannot be efficiently produced without a close study of existing sources.

The necessity for training was not confined to those who were to work the machines, but included those engaged in the distribution of their productions. A Mechanics' Institute was also established in Aberdeen in 1824, at the instigation of some of the more advanced citizens. "They were, some of them, men of exceptional intelligence and enterprise, and alive to the importance of providing for their fellow-citizens, and especially those of the tradesman class, opportunities of instruction in the various sciences connected with their several callings".⁴ It was quickly realised throughout the country that these Institutes and their libraries could be of very great value, and their growth, considering the state of education at the time, was quite remarkable, although not unexpected when linked up with the equally remarkable expansion then taking place in many other directions.

³ Baker, E. A. *The Public Library*. O'Connor, 1922, p. 4.

⁴ Robertson, A. W., *The Public Libraries of Aberdeen*. *The Library*, Vol. 6, 1894, p. 1.

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It was realised very early in the Industrial Revolution, by a number of philanthropists and reformers, that the rapid industrialisation of the country was bringing with it an industrialised labouring class which lived under such appalling conditions of dirt and squalor that large numbers of them would soon sink to the level of beasts if nothing were done to counteract the evil influence of their working conditions. It was in response to this need that a number of moral organisations began their work. This involved the use of books as a humanising influence; since nothing could be done immediately to remedy the economic conditions, these societies tended to concentrate on spiritual and mental welfare.

Thus it came about that in the years preceding the setting up of the Royal Commission, there was a considerable increase in the use of books, firstly as a means of acquiring new knowledge, and secondly as a civilising factor in the lives of the working classes to act as an antidote to the degrading effect of their employment. These were the two main planks in the platform of the chief organisers of the movement to establish public libraries. The minutes of evidence, quoted extensively by Wellard, show that these organisers were men who were conscious of the depressed state of the lower classes, and having seen the value of reading, both in village libraries and in the Mechanics' Institutes, considered that the State should assume the responsibility of putting books within the reach of all.

Unfortunately their action came too late to benefit by the urge for information which had produced the first Mechanics' Institutes. Judging from the evidence, many of the books in these libraries by then consisted of a poor class of fiction, and although their value was repeatedly

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asserted by the witnesses, it seems likely that the use made of them had actually fallen to a low level in many cases. "None became a reference library, a magazine of knowledge."⁵ To understand the reason for this, it is once more necessary to examine the historical context. By this time, those who had been in the forefront of the engineering world had become a sort of aristocracy, keeping abreast of new developments by contact with others of the same level. It was this that led to the establishment of the learned scientific bodies, such as the Institution of Mechanical Engineers, which was founded in 1847, with George Stephenson as its first President. The number of such societies increased rapidly during the period that followed, and it was ultimately as a result of their formation that the specialised library, and the scientific and technical journal, came to assume their great value as means of acquiring and disseminating new information. By this time also, the need which had produced the first Mechanics' Institutions was no longer so pressing, since there had been a generation of progress in which to produce familiarity with the new machinery, and there was now a supply of teachers and lecturers, from among those who were founding the new societies. Thus the movement which produced the first libraries in which the books were collected for use, and not for preservation mainly, had begun to draw away from the public library movement itself, and it was not long before nearly all contact was lost. Even to this day, these two streams of development have not united completely.

The inspirers of the Act could not be expected to foresee this split, and they seem to have anticipated that the book supply was assured, no doubt having the Mechanics'

⁵ *Report on the state of the Mechanics' Institutions, 1841.*

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Institutions in mind. In the first Act, therefore, no provision was made for money to be spent on books, and it was thought that this could be safely left to individual donors. Disillusionment came very quickly, as Edwards found in Manchester. He had realised at once the value of a technical library to the town, and accordingly helped to form the Scientific Library Association.⁶ It lasted only one year, even in Manchester, and the establishment of the technical library there was delayed for nearly seventy years. Thus the opportunity to make the public library take the high place in the sciences that the scholarly libraries held in the arts was lost, and has never recurred.

The predominating influence in the early growth of public libraries, therefore, came from the other aspect of the movement, which regarded books, not as sources of new information, but as a civilising influence in the lives of the workers. It is not surprising, then, that they tended to concentrate upon the humanities. Following the example of the great scholarly libraries, the librarian was in many cases himself a scholar, often an antiquary, as can be seen from the qualifications of some of the public librarians of the last century, before the establishment of the Library Association's system of examinations. Close contact was maintained with national and university libraries, and when the time came to form the Library Association, much of the impetus came from them; on the first Council there were many more members from those libraries than from public libraries. Significant, also, is the fact that the libraries of the Patent Office and of the Science Museum have both been regarded as "special", though they are both open to the public, are

⁶ Haslam, G. E., *Manchester Review*, Vol. 4, Autumn, 1947, p. 403.

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both supported by public money, and differ only from the normal municipal library in that they restrict the compass of their stock to science, and do not cater for the humanities. Further, from the very beginning of the Association's examinations, English literature has held a place of considerable importance in them, though there is in fact no more reason to favour that subject than any other, in training for general libraries such as the public libraries were intended to be. It has even been said, on occasions when the alteration of the syllabus has been under discussion, that the omission of this subject would mean that librarians would lose their only claim to scholarship! Fortunately, this attitude has not prevailed, and at last there is an opportunity for those in course of training to extend their subject knowledge to almost any of the arts and sciences.

The establishment and growth of the humanistic tradition had a very important effect on the position of the staff, and on the evolution of library technique. One of the results of the first Act was that the authority, being under an obligation to provide a building, often took little thought for its purpose, and put up a very unsuitable building requiring most of the library rate for its maintenance. It was frequently found that the "librarian" was appointed to perform the duties of a caretaker, and even as late as 1897 it can be seen from Greenwood's Year Book that in most libraries a large percentage of the staff consisted of janitors.⁷ The idea

⁷ An advertisement which was quoted in the *Library Assistant* during 1901 is worth reproducing. Among the duties of the librarian were ". . . to keep the building and its contents in a clean and proper condition, and attend to the lighting and warming thereof, . . . to act as Billiard Marker, and, if required, undertake catering for the members".

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of the librarian as a "keeper" of books came to be firmly established, and still retains a wide currency, as can be seen from the remarks of J. E. Holmstrom, who edited the section on library services of the Royal Society Scientific Information Conference in July, 1948: "a librarian in the traditional sense is concerned with the acquisition and storage of books; but in no way with analysing their contents or evaluating them". This is a completely false definition of the functions of a true librarian, but it serves to emphasise how the profession fell into disrepute because of its lack of contact with those who are chiefly concerned with the use of books as sources of knowledge. It is a commentary on this decline that the man chosen to lead the discussion on this section of the Conference should not be a "qualified" librarian, nor even a member of the Library Association.⁸

This should not be taken to imply a criticism of the value of the study of the humanities, nor to suggest that the public library has been wrong in devoting much attention to them. What is wrong is that because this split occurred at the very beginning of the movement, it grew up in an atmosphere which was overwhelmingly biased in favour of one section of culture, to the detriment of the other and its consequent lack of importance for members of the staffs. This has even aroused comment from overseas: ". . . the Anglo-Saxon public library, that is the general library intended for all classes and supplying books for instructive and recreative reading, but not for scientific and industrial research".⁹

⁸ Cf. *Nature*, Vol. 162, August 21st, 1948, p. 284.

⁹ Bourgeois, Pierre, *Library Association Record*, Vol. 52, No. 3, March, 1950, p. 82.

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Now the library services that are required in the sciences and the arts differ to a certain extent, owing to the differences in the nature of the material, and the way in which it is sought in books. In the sciences, little attention is paid to the preservation of material for its own sake, apart from certain "classics" such as Newton, Darwin or Rutherford, which have acquired a historical interest because the revolutionary discoveries and theories which they contain have made them landmarks in human progress. In general, however, the needs of scientists are to be kept informed of the most recent work, so that valuable time is not wasted in duplication of effort. Further, the chief interest is in a subject, and attention is paid to individual authors mainly because they are known to be associated with certain fields of knowledge. In other words, the scientific librarian requires to be what has come to be called an "information officer". He should be a subject specialist as well as a trained librarian, in order that he may appreciate the needs of his scientific colleagues, and select the material which must be brought to their attention. He must be as the older librarians were, an authority on the contents of his library, which is again possible because of its limited scope. ". . . the special library by its limitation to a comparatively restricted scope is making it possible for a return to the old-fashioned librarian who knew the insides of his books".¹⁰ It is clear that such a man must be highly qualified and trained, and should therefore be considered equal in standing to his fellow-scientists, as was recommended by the Scientific Information Conference.

In the humanities, on the other hand, most of the literary output has a more or less permanent value, as

¹⁰ Johnston, R. H., *Special Libraries*, A.L.A., 1915.

being the product of the imagination of the writer, and not being based on the extent of knowledge available at the time of writing, and limited by it. A work is valuable, not because it leads to the discovery of new knowledge which supersedes it, but for its elevating effect on the mind of the reader, derived from the contemplation of the lofty thoughts and emotions of a great mind. It may not of itself have any immediate "use" in a material sense, nor does it in general have the same urgency of application as a scientific work. The relative position of the arts and sciences may perhaps be judged from the fact that, while research in the arts is mainly confined to individuals or academic centres, in the sciences there are innumerable organisations sponsoring new work which will be applied in technical production. But while it may lack urgency of application, a new work in the arts has a much more permanent value, since a new theory does not necessarily render previous work out of date. For instance, the 1798 preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, though of outstanding importance in the study of poetic diction, does not "supersede" the poetry of Pope and the Augustans. For libraries whose concern is with the mental and spiritual improvement of readers, then, the need for speedy dissemination of information is not so urgent, but greater value is attached to the personality of the individual author.

In the humanities, in fact, the usual library approach has been the "author approach", whereas in the sciences it is the "subject approach" which is the more common. Where the library concentrates on the humanities, therefore, it is expected that readers will do their own bibliographical work, so that by the time a request reaches the assistant, the author and title are generally

known. It is obvious that it requires no great skill in librarianship to ascertain whether a book whose author and title are known is in the stock. Hence the exaggerated importance attached to these details in library practice—as in the main codes for cataloguing.

For most categories of request, however, the reader's wish is first expressed via the subject; the author and title are of less importance in that any work containing the required information will be satisfactory. The request will be put to the staff in this form, and the onus of bibliographical research passes from the reader to the librarian. It is this fact which necessitates the presence of skilled staff, backed up by a thorough and reliable organisation.

Moreover, as the barriers between sciences and humanities are overcome, and they become less sharply differentiated, this type of approach tends to become more common, especially as the literature of each field of knowledge grows in bulk. Readers will not necessarily, for instance, require a specific work on the ballet or landscape painting in the nineteenth century; they will often ask for "a book" on such subjects. And even in literature, where it might be thought that no subject approach could exist with regard to the works of individuals, there is in fact a concealed subject approach, since the author himself is the subject, and is studied as such through his literary expression. The term, subject approach, connotes purposive reading; and even in literature, reading of an individual author's works is purposive in that it is prompted by a love of that author and a desire to know him better.

The distinction between these two forms of approach was particularly evident in the latter part of the last

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century, when the division between sciences and arts was unnaturally accentuated. The worst excesses of the Industrial Revolution brought about a reaction against technical achievements and the sciences that had made them possible. The work of the Pre-Raphaelites, and the idea of "Art for Art's sake", meant that workers whose sphere was the imagination were drawing more and more away from society, and that because of this their work was beginning to lose its relevance to the experience of the average citizen. Yet there was a pressing need for the benefits brought by the study of great art, as can be seen from the immense popularity of the masters of the novel. This was realised by William Morris, who endeavoured to bring beauty into the realm of technical production, and hoped by his own example to persuade men that union between the two was possible and necessary.

As the century drew to its end, the importance of the humanities began to decline, concurrently with the rise in importance of the sciences. The public libraries, having confined themselves to the task of uplift, were inevitably influenced by this decline, and as they were bound to follow public taste to some extent, they found that large stocks of fiction were necessary if they were to make any case for their existence on the score of public demand. The early years of the journals of librarianship contain many discussions on the value of fiction, but one scarcely ever finds a reference to the service that could be given to local industries. It was considered essential for a public librarian to have a good knowledge of English Literature, and some acquaintance with the other arts, but since the users of technical literature were not relying on the public libraries, the staff were not expected to spend much

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of their time in becoming expert in the bibliography of the sciences.

Some idea of the use made of public libraries during the first few decades of their existence can be gained from the statistics given by Edwards in a general survey of the progress made in the larger industrial towns, where one might expect to find a high level of loans in the sciences owing to the nature of the local industries.¹¹ At Manchester, for example, the cumulative total for the first five years included

| | |
|-------------------|---------|
| Literature | 161,768 |
| History | 100,963 |
| Sciences and Arts | 46,266 |

and for the five years ending in 1868,

| | |
|-------------------|---------|
| Literature | 269,226 |
| History | 84,816 |
| Sciences and Arts | 66,401 |

At Liverpool, in 1868, the stock figures were,

| | |
|-------------------|--------|
| History | 12,167 |
| Literature | 18,327 |
| Sciences and Arts | 8,767 |

while the issues for the same year were,

| | |
|-------------------|---------|
| History | 80,031 |
| Literature | 402,035 |
| Sciences and Arts | 58,006 |

At Sheffield, for the years 1856–1867, the issues were,

| | |
|-------------------|---------|
| History | 337,695 |
| Literature | 947,339 |
| Sciences and Arts | 154,495 |

At Birmingham, for the year 1868,

| | |
|-------------------|---------|
| History | 38,591 |
| Literature | 225,576 |
| Sciences and Arts | 16,529 |

¹¹ *Free Town Libraries*, Trübner, 1869.

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Later figures given by Thomas Greenwood show a continued rise in the fiction issues as compared with non-fiction.¹² The stock at Manchester in 1883-84 is quoted as follows:

| | |
|-------------------|--------|
| History | 19,485 |
| Literature | 21,199 |
| Sciences and Arts | 11,783 |

and issues

| | |
|-------------------|----------------------------|
| History | 43,705 |
| Literature | 91,155 (excluding fiction) |
| Sciences and Arts | 67,715 |

The rise in Sciences and Arts is not paralleled at Liverpool:

| | |
|-------------------|-----------------------------|
| History | 81,000 (approximately) |
| Literature | 160,000 (excluding fiction) |
| Sciences and Arts | 48,000 |
| Fiction | 413,000 |

It might appear from these figures that the sciences were not actually lagging far behind, considering the state of public education. But the contents of the Sciences and Arts class must be taken into consideration, and they are interesting as showing not only the way in which knowledge was grouped at the time, but also that the scheme used by Edwards at Manchester did not differ significantly in its main serial order from that produced by Cutter many years afterwards. It would be interesting to know whether there was in fact any influence on Cutter. In any case, it is clear from the division of this class that, low as they usually are, the issue figures still do not give a true representation of the books borrowed in the sciences.

¹² *Free Public Libraries*, Simpkin, Marshall, 1886.

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Sciences and Arts

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Collective works. | 7. Arts of writing. |
| 2. Physical sciences. | 8. Musical and histrionic arts. |
| 3. Mathematical sciences. | |
| 4. Mechanical arts. | 9. Medical arts. |
| 5. Military and naval arts. | 10. Domestic and recreative arts. |
| 6. Arts of design. | |

It is obvious that the preponderance of issues from such a collection as this would not be from divisions 2, 3 and 4. The schemes in use at the other libraries do not always correspond exactly to this one, but there is sufficient similarity to allow the same grouping for purposes of comparison.

Further evidence of the influence exerted by the moral uplift tradition may be gathered from Greenwood's book. The frontispiece is the famous cartoon, "Which shall it be?", showing on the one side an obviously upright citizen about to enter a singularly unattractive-looking Free Library, and on the other a disreputable character leaning against the wall of a public house, dangling a wisp of cigarette from beer-sodden lips. This part of the campaign finds expression also in a letter from Sir Trevor Lawrence to the Public Librarian of Wandsworth in 1885: "Public libraries, moreover, supply, in the best form, an antidote or counter-attraction to the public house" (page 8); and again in a letter from J. F. Nicholls, the Public Librarian of Bristol, to the *Christian World*, in a controversy over the opening of rate-supported libraries in Hackney: "The more time a working-man spends in the free library or at home, with a book or newspaper, the less time he has for getting drunk" (page 258); while an equally moral thought is given voice by

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Sir John Lubbock at Shrewsbury, also in 1885: "Moreover, how far better it is to spend money on libraries and schools than on prisons" (page 9).

Of equal significance for the other side of the story is the spread of the scientific societies and institutions to cover all the important branches of the sciences and mechanical arts. The earliest of the institutions is that of the Civil Engineers in 1818. After a gap comes the Chemical Society in 1841, Mechanical Engineers in 1847, Naval Architects in 1860, Gas Engineers in 1863, Electrical Engineers in 1871, Royal Sanitary Institute in 1876, Royal Institute of Chemistry in 1877, Society of Chemical Industry in 1881, and Marine Engineers in 1889. It is in this period, too, that the scientific journals began to grow rapidly in numbers. There are too many to note, but their growth serves to emphasise that the seekers after information of an advanced kind were providing their own way of recording, acquiring and disseminating it, and were not relying on the public library service.

Since the turn of the century, there has been an ever increasing output of technical information in the form of journals, pamphlets, conference proceedings, patent literature, and books. This has been caused by the growing application of scientific discovery and method to all branches of industry, where in many cases empirical methods and craftsman traditions were formerly the rule. The impetus given to this movement by the first World War culminated in the foundation of the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research in 1916, and the establishment of the Research Associations in the years that followed. It was realised that, with the spread of scientific research in this way, there was bound to be

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great duplication of effort if the results of new work were not quickly published and made widely known to those who were working in the same field. From the start, therefore, great attention was paid to the development of the library and information sections of these organisations. Individual industrial concerns had also begun to establish libraries by the beginning of this century, particularly in the United States, where the Special Library Association was founded in 1909, and this trend soon became strong in England also.

Thus there came into existence, in industry, in scientific societies, in Chambers of Commerce, and research organisations of every kind, a library movement which was far away from the tradition of the public library, and was not by any means based entirely on books. It has already been pointed out that the duties of the scientific librarian have a great urgency about them, and that he is as much concerned with dissemination as with acquisition and arrangement. Owing to the importance of the subject approach, a trained scientist was usually appointed to do this work, often at first in his spare time as part of a position designated "Laboratory Manager" or some similar vague title. Now because the public libraries were associated from the start with moral uplift, which had become somewhat eclipsed by this time, and because the public libraries had a considerable bias towards the humanities, most of these scientists were unwilling to receive the title of "librarian", and for want of a better name, called themselves "Information Officers". Their view was that they were more than mere curators, and were therefore rather better than librarians. "The tobacco-and-sweets shop library immediately suggests to the mind the municipal

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library. . . ."¹³ The actual curatorship was frequently left in the hands of a junior clerk or typist. Unfortunately, the professional literature has done little to dispel this idea, since the accent in textbooks is always on the purely public library side. Another bad result is the wide variety of methods which have been found in special libraries, where the approach has tended to be purely empirical. As Johnston pointed out, "too often the special librarian, trained in his specialty but untrained in library methods, makes the mistake of heralding as a new discovery the application of some method well known in the library world".

A move towards overcoming this split and remedying the deficiency has been made in some of the larger towns, where Technical and Commercial libraries have been established. The drawback to this form of empiricism is that, like the Reference library, these departments are seen as "special" sections, and the need which has called them into being has not been analysed to show its relation to the library service as a whole. The implications, for librarianship, of the reader's approach must be fully understood in order to achieve a high level of service in the *library*, and not merely in some specialised department.

¹³ Silvester, W. A., Special libraries, their nature and nurture. Aslib meeting on industrial services, Manchester, May 8th, 1946.

CHAPTER II

THE PROBLEM NOW BEFORE PUBLIC LIBRARIES

THE RESULT of this dual tradition is that those in whom the desire for new knowledge is strong through the requirements of their daily lives are generally turning to a special library of one sort or another to supply their needs, rather than the public libraries. Insufficient attention has been paid to understanding the role of knowledge in our lives, and the necessity for some form of intermediary between the flood of publications and those who require to use them. In the first place, authority set up the building, which appeared to be the most important element, and left it to donors to provide the books. When this was found to be a failure, a very small sum was allowed to be spent on books, but even then, the standards of book selection and service to readers were left to look after themselves. Even in special libraries, growing dissatisfaction led to the Scientific Information Conference, and the situation is very clearly summarised in the 1949 Aldred Lecture, given to the Royal Society of Arts by Sir Alfred Egerton.¹

It could not be expected that any form of request service would develop in the early days, since the closed access system was in force, and there could therefore be no systematic subject approach by the reader. It was

¹ Published in the *Journal of the R.S.A.*, Vol. XCVII, No. 4800, 1949, pp. 688-704.

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inevitable, too, that the Anglo-American Code should concentrate on the author entry as the most important, and that the dictionary catalogue, where the main entry is under the author, should for so long be considered the most helpful. Only a few realised that there were revolutionary implications in the Act of 1850, that the free provision of knowledge for all as a social obligation was a radically new principle which would inevitably bring in its train a new approach to the pursuit of knowledge. Edwards himself, with his usual clarity of vision, saw the subject approach as becoming increasingly important, and maintained that "*any* really 'classified' catalogue" was bound to be of much greater assistance to the reader than "*the best* conceivable catalogue arranged according to authors' names".²

But many years were to pass before a new outlook came to free the public library from the chains of closed access, and even then there were many who strenuously opposed the change. Like so many other things, the ultimate change was mainly due to Brown, who expressly advocated on the grounds that, among other things, it facilitated the subject approach.³ He saw, too, that it could not function adequately without a much more systematic form of classification than had been used previously, and accordingly published his Adjustable and Subject schemes as more suitable than the Decimal Classification for English libraries. It is unfortunate that he did not develop the subject approach theme, and this side of the question played little part in the controversy, which was mainly fought out on such strictly unenterprising issues as whether the losses would increase, or the

² *Free Town Libraries*, p. 52.

³ For example, in *The Library*, Vol. 4, 1892, p. 302.

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amount of extra tidying that would fall on the staff. The first real attempt to analyse the problem came from India, where S. R. Ranganathan published his *Five Laws of Library Science* in 1925. This work has had very little attention in this country, though it is difficult to see why; for some reason or other, it is always said that Ranganathan's works are only applicable in India, as if librarianship, and indeed knowledge in general, were different in India from elsewhere. He is representative of a new line of thought: that librarianship is a science, and like any other true science, is capable of being reduced to a few basic and all-pervading laws to which all problems, at whatever level, can be related. The laws are worth quoting:

Books are for use.

Books are for all, and every reader his book.

Every book its reader.

Save the time of the reader.

A library is a growing organism.

In answer to the contention that these are trivialities which cannot be dignified by the name of laws, the author points out that most scientific laws are apparently simple statements with great implications. So with the laws of library science.

In 1931 came the second volume of the H. E. Bliss trilogy, *The Organisation of knowledge in libraries, and the subject approach to books*. This set out to show that the most common approach of the user of a library is some form of subject searching, and Bliss gave a fairly detailed analysis of the ways in which a reader may look for information, in order to justify his theory of classification developed in the first part of the trilogy, *The*

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Organisation of knowledge and the system of the sciences. He does not, however, make any attempt to relate his conclusions to the way in which the staff should develop their technique. More recently, Ranganathan has outlined his theory of the present stage of the growth of mind, and of the part which the library has to play in man's development.⁴

The problem may be more clearly seen by examining the various phases into which the progress of knowledge falls: its production and publication, its acquisition and arrangement, its distribution and use. The last phase completes the cycle, and leads to the production of more knowledge, more new literature. A better understanding of the true role of the librarian can be gained from a study of this cycle.

New knowledge does not spring forth as an isolated act of creation on the part of the author. It generally results from a long period of study or research in which many others have played some part. Its publication is a social effort, in which the new discovery is made available to the public in general by an agent who is the author. New knowledge is not invented; it is discovered, and is available for discovery according to the degree of advancement of the society in which the discoverer works. "Knowledge is essentially a description and not an explanation—the object of science is to describe in conceptual shorthand the routine of a past experience, with a view to predicting our future experience".⁵ Once the discovery is made, it is communicated by means of one of several media:

⁴ Reference Service and Humanism, *Abgila*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1949, p. 1.

⁵ Pearson, Karl, *The Grammar of Science*, Black, 2e, 1900, p. 500.

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journals, pamphlets, books or lectures, and in this way it becomes available for others. Since the system of publication is still haphazard and unorganised, it remains to some extent a matter of chance whether or not the new material reaches the right readers. To illustrate this, there is the famous example of the classic paper of Mendel, buried for some thirty years in the pages of a little-known Swiss journal before its importance was realised. A very costly and somewhat cumbersome system of abstracting journals has been built up in the sciences, and there are the various H. W. Wilson Indexes, the *Subject Index to Periodicals*, and the work of the Modern Humanities Research Association, to draw attention to new work in the arts.

It is in the second, the acquisition and arrangement stage, that librarians have tended to concentrate their efforts. Even here, the public library has been generally content to remain at the level of books, and there is still inadequate realisation of the use that can be made of periodicals and pamphlets. There is a vast professional literature on acquisition and arrangement, but as yet one cannot say there is a great deal of understanding of their role in the presentation of new knowledge. In the field of book selection, for example, far more attention has been given to the question of how to decide whether or not to buy a given book than to a systematic study of the sources of information about new publications. The mechanics of acquisition, too, leave much to be desired, if textbooks are to be believed. Methods are still based on those adopted generations ago, with some modifications to make use of such inventions as the typewriter and carbon paper. These methods, like those of cataloguing and classification, are of the greatest importance for

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the librarian, but they are not the boundaries of his province.

It would be wrong to say that the third stage, that of distribution and use, is more important than the other two, since all three stages are parts of a single process, and no one of them can be singled out as more valuable than the rest. Obviously, failure in any one of them seriously affects the whole cycle. But distribution and use is what concerns library reference services most closely, and has been most affected by the failure to consider the approach of the user. In special libraries, the situation has sometimes arisen in which the Information Service has been divorced from librarianship, though based on library materials. It has not been realised that distribution and use is also part of librarianship, and Information Officers have tended to be subject specialists who use the librarian as an assistant in arrangement and finding. The position is now gradually changing, because of a fusion of the two skills and a growing appreciation of their inter-dependence; one cannot function efficiently as an Information Officer without a good knowledge of the other two phases of the advance of knowledge, production and acquisition. It is significant that the problems of arrangement, or classification, have been extensively debated in special library circles—much more than among public librarians, in spite of the examination syllabus. This is because the information staff realise the importance of arrangement through their approach to the library as users. "In organising a special library one cannot escape the problems of classification, for in such a library we are dealing almost exclusively with the subject approach to books".*

* Pendleton, O. W., *J. Documentation*, Vol. 3, No. 4, March 1948, p. 232.

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The public library in general has not reached the same stage, because it has failed to recognise its duties towards the use of its stock. The attitude has been that of assuming responsibility for getting the material on the shelves, and leaving the rest to the reader. Librarians learn about production and publication in an academic way, for the examinations, but they exert little influence in the sphere, for example in securing re-publication of popular works which have gone out of print, or even of getting the right bibliographical information—Christian names, dates—on the title pages. Attention has, in fact, been concentrated on acquisition and arrangement, ploughing the same field endlessly in the effort to reach perfection, but without the necessary consideration of the function of these techniques in the cycle of progress. New life has recently been injected into these studies by the work of Bliss, Ranganathan and F.I.D. in classification, and by the development of Ranganathan's ingenious chain procedure in subject cataloguing. But as yet it cannot even be said that there is general agreement on the superiority of the classified catalogue, a proof that service to readers is in its infancy. No one who has ever dealt with readers' requests, whether in a public or a special library, can doubt that the dictionary arrangement is greatly inferior. Even using chain procedure, which assembles all the distributed facets of a main class in an alphabetical array, the dictionary catalogue cannot give a complete conspectus of a subject in a single place, as the classified catalogue does.

When considering the use of recorded knowledge, then, it seems fairly clear that in public libraries the onus of bibliographical research has generally been passed to the

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reader. Subject specialisation is as yet a novelty, and in the past, librarians, conscious of their lack of subject knowledge, have denied themselves the right to evaluate in their book selection. There is a world of difference between evaluation and discrimination. With a limited book fund, it is not only the right, but the duty of the librarian to be able to evaluate. "The second traditional objection is that the librarian does not have the right to dictate what other people shall and shall not read. I heartily agree with that statement, but I think that the librarian *does* have the right to decide what shall be placed on the library's shelves (which is an entirely different thing). It is the right of his office—the right that permits the conductor of a symphony to select Hindemith and eschew Hit Parade."⁷ Protests against this are based, consciously and unconsciously, on an awareness of incompetence and lack of subject knowledge. Hence, in special libraries, the failure to realise that evaluation is also part of the librarian's duty, and the establishment of the separate function of Information Officer. If, as is so often stated, librarianship is to be the profession of "making use of books", it is vital that the implications of this should be understood, so that when the possibilities of mechanisation are fully realised, librarians do not once more become mere custodians with uniform and peaked cap.

The evaluation of material in special libraries, and the direct contact with readers to ensure that they obtain the right material, form part of the duties of the Information Officer, but the work is usually done in the library

⁷ Asheim, Lester. What kind of books? What kind of readers? *College and Research Libraries*, Vol. 10, No. 3, July, 1949, p. 242.

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section, with the librarian as one of the staff of the Information Officer, in a subordinate position. But by the nature of his duties, the librarian should be capable of developing into an information officer, and of assessing the stock as well as making it easily available. The opportunity is there, and failure to grasp it means a loss to both staff and readers.

In public libraries, however, the situation is not nearly so obvious, and therefore to many it does not exist. The cycle of progress shows how knowledge advances at the wave-front of each field, and it may be objected that such service could not be expected from a public library, and indeed would not be sought there. But the method of advance is similar at all stages, so that what is "new" knowledge for the general reader need not be, and generally is not, "new" in the absolute sense. "Discovery" for any reader is relative to what he knows already, and the fact that what he "discovers" has long been well known to others does not in any way lessen its newness for him. Almost any piece of knowledge, therefore, may at some stage become "new" in this sense, and the importance of the librarian's task in ensuring that it reaches the right reader can hardly be overestimated.

So far, the significance of this has hardly been appreciated. It has been considered adequate to put the books on the shelves as far as possible with limited funds, and to deal with requests by *ad hoc* methods, confining the expert personal assistance to the Reference Department. The majority of readers are not yet accustomed to look in lending libraries for qualified guidance in their selection of reading. As Savage has said, "For a moment or two think of another large group of readers who use public libraries for a time and then stay away because

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our resources have failed them. Most of them are technologists, seekers after information, or Matthew Arnold's true disciples of culture, people who read with purpose".⁸

The usual attitude found among members of the public is one of two. The first is that of the "seeker after information" who believes the public library to be incapable of dealing with a problem at his level, and relies on a special library or a subscription library such as the London Library or H. K. Lewis' Library. Many of these are conscious of the value of libraries, but do not realise that public libraries exist for any but recreational reading. With the organisation of the National Central Library and the Regional Library Services, too, it is surely wrong to suggest, as Savage does, that it is the *resources* that are to blame. It is far more likely to be due to the lack of an organised service at the point where books are borrowed; if the advanced worker in any field only meets junior assistants who have to divide their time between him and the "issue", he is not encouraged to discuss his requirements with them. It is absolutely essential that there should always be senior staff available whose main duty is to deal with requests. Savage has emphasised this: "Book selection by specialist or subject librarians will be of small benefit to readers unless librarianship is always in touch with them at the point of service, instead of being shut away in the servants' quarters".⁹

The second, but no less important view, is that of the ordinary reader who may use his local library regularly, but does not realise just how vast is the amount of information contained in books, or how they can help

⁸ *Special Librarianship*, p. 14

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 16

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him, and so fails to use the library efficiently.¹⁰ Efforts are made sporadically by displays and the issue of book-lists, but these cannot succeed without an organised request service *constantly* at hand to give skilled attention to readers' demands. No amount of hit-or-miss publicity can equal the power of a systematic satisfaction of needs in encouraging continued use of the service.

Both of these attitudes are to a certain extent the fault of the profession, which has had over fifty years of open access in which to demonstrate its value as a source of knowledge, and with a few outstanding exceptions has failed. At present, it cannot be said that the public library is a significant factor in the community, and indeed there are librarians who seek to deny that it ought to try to be, though they usually conceal their suggestion in the guise of "not interfering with the individual". Although it is true to say that readers often wish to browse at the shelves, and in such cases may be embarrassed by offers of help, to imply that a request service is interference shows a lack of understanding of its true nature. It does not simply look around for questions to answer, nor does it wait for them to take it by surprise. It encourages them by giving a system which ensures that they receive adequate attention. Once the results are manifest, the demand is bound to grow; where there is no service, there cannot be any demand, and consequently there is no apparent problem, while those who put forward measures for its solution are apt to be dismissed as cranks seeking to complicate a perfectly straightforward discipline.

At the same time, there is a great deal of evidence to show that, in spite of the apparently calm progress, a

¹⁰ Cf. the character of "Tich" in Frank Tilsley's novel, *Icedrome*.

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certain amount of dissatisfaction exists in the profession. Some of the more progressive librarians have admitted that they are not carrying out their responsibility to the community, and are debating means of improving the service. Specialists have been asked to address conferences, to discover how the special library fulfils its task. But different conditions of course imply different methods, though the purpose may be similar. The special library has not been imposed upon its readers by an indifferent authority; it has been formed as a result of action by the readers themselves. It is their own tool, formed to meet their needs, to their own specifications. Its methods are simple—for example the circulation of a bulletin of abstracts—and are designed to play an active part in drawing the attention of the reader to new material in his field of work. To do this for every reader would be virtually impossible in public libraries at present, as the requirements of the public are so varied, and the library tries to cater for their leisure as well as their serious study. A new approach to the question must be made, taking into consideration the different circumstances applying in public libraries.

It is possible that there is no solution without some drastic changes in the methods now in use. But a new approach to some of the problems, and a better understanding of the requirements of readers, can produce an organisation which will give a service that is a good deal better than the present average. One of the main causes of the low standard in lending libraries is the artificial distinction from reference libraries, which produces unsatisfactory results because the lending library does not aim at a high level of personal service, while the reference library does not provide books for loan. Many librarians

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suggest that the reference library can provide all the qualified assistance that a reader may require, and accordingly try to deal with all requests there even though they may be received in the lending department. Yet readers do not think of the average reference library as a place where they may borrow books for study; it is where they look for items of specific information, and its resources are organised to this end. This, of course, is the reason why it is undesirable for reference books to be taken off the premises. To try to satisfy a lending library request with a reference library book will generally not suit the reader unless the book is made available for loan.

The crux of the matter, perhaps, is the recognition that it is in the lending library that the majority of users make their acquaintance with the public library; that the primary purpose which these libraries should serve is the provision of informative as well as of recreational reading; and that there is more in the provision of information than simply the giving of specific answers to specific questions. Once these points are accepted and acted upon, there will be an immense advance in the value of the public library, and its work will begin to have a much more general significance, since the service will be based on active assistance to readers and the provision of material directly related to the type of knowledge they wish to acquire.

The desire for knowledge is a frail one, not having the same pressing demand for satisfaction as physical hunger. With far too many people, it is born and dies in almost the same instant, as a vague and unexpressed wish aroused by a consciousness of deficiency. This may be entirely temporary and more or less unimportant to the mental well-being of the person; if they possess a library of their

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own, they may be so far stimulated as to look for the answer in one of their books, but it is unlikely that they would proceed to a series of actions such as are involved in going to another source of information, especially if the source is a doubtful one. On the other hand, it may be of vital importance that they should acquire certain knowledge, such as that demanded in an examination, in order to secure for themselves a better future. Between these two extremes, there is a vast number of variations in the degree of impact which the desire for any piece of knowledge may make; but in almost all of them it is true to say that the possession of the knowledge would contribute to the improvement of the happiness of the possessor. In most cases, lack of such knowledge does not mean a great or lasting unhappiness, but only a small and probably temporary discontent; the sum of many such discontents, however, may ultimately make the difference between a happy and an unhappy life.

Now if the place of the library in the community is to see that life is improved by the means of books, as we all agree, it is obvious that small dissatisfactions arising from lack of knowledge are the immediate concern of the library. But if the professional attitude remains that of merely providing the books and passing the onus of using them on to the reader, there will be no response in the mind of the public, no automatic turn to the library when a problem arises. In a special library, this is almost invariably the immediate reaction when a question is posed that cannot be answered out of the personal knowledge of the poser or his associates; they know that the library is their source of other people's knowledge, and that it is maintained for the purpose of solving such questions. It has, in fact, been built up with

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precisely that aim. But this cannot be said of the public library, apart from those specialised departments which are given the designation of "technical" or "commercial". As has been seen, the predominant trend during the early years was the moral one, and now that it has lost its significance, there is no other systematically cultivated development to take its place.

The problem now before public libraries, therefore, may be said to be that of making the general reader turn automatically to books as sources of information as well as of recreation. "Old libraries were conceived as depositories of knowledge: the modern library should be a distributor and organiser of knowledge".¹¹ The process by which a consciousness of mental want provokes a course of action to satisfy that want must be understood, and an efficient organisation set up to see that once the seeker has come to the library, and posed his request, he will not need to concern himself further; either it will be satisfied at once by skilled reference service technique, or the organisation will come into action to ensure that the right material is procured with as little delay as possible. In this way, the public library can help to carry out one of the tasks proposed for U.N.E.S.C.O., to "stimulate awareness of the public library service so that the demand will come, not simply from high-minded administrators or from public librarians themselves, but from the mass of the people whom they serve".¹² It is not enough to provide buildings, books, skilled staff to do the cataloguing, classifying and administration, if no effort is made to interpret the stock in terms of the needs

¹¹ Bernal, J. D., *The Freedom of Necessity*, Routledge, 1949, p. 226.

¹² Carter, E. J., *Library Quarterly*, Vol. 18, 1948, p. 235.

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of readers, or to show them how good technique will reveal helpful material in *any* subject. Even today, most people do not realise that, for everyday purposes, nearly *all* knowledge is recorded—that even home bottling or toy railways have their own literature. The task, therefore, is to develop a technique that will be satisfactory from the point of view of the third stage of the progress of knowledge, that of distribution and use; a technique to ensure, as Ranganathan has put it, that books are for use.

CHAPTER III

UNDERSTANDING READERS

HAVING ESTABLISHED the nature of the task, the approach of the reader must be considered, so that it can clearly be seen what is the duty of the staff, and what type of enquiry they are likely to receive. It has been shown that while in every human mind there frequently arises the consciousness of lack of knowledge, not everyone is aware of the duty and the capacity of the public library to satisfy it, and further to stimulate the desire for more knowledge. In most cases, if the need is satisfied, a significant contribution will have been made to the well-being of the reader, since knowledge is usually sought for some purpose and not in isolation. The need for knowledge, therefore, is usually to enable the human mind to achieve a greater degree of self-expression which, like most other expressions of human energy, takes the form of a wish to project one's personality by means of action of one sort or another, literary or scientific, mental or practical. This projection of thought-energy is at its beginning a vague and often feeble urge, which becomes more organised and more purposeful with an increasing degree of education. Education is, in fact, the process of giving direction to such urges by teaching the highways of knowledge and classifying the materials that are encountered along them.

The user of a special library is aware of its value to

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him because he already knows the path of knowledge along which he is travelling. He expects the librarian to put the right material before him as it is published, so that his advance becomes more significant, and so that he does not have to cover ground that has already been covered by others. This service is not yet expected of the public library, partly because some readers are unaware of a directional impulse, and partly because those that are aware of such an impulse do not turn to the public library for help in solving their problems because they do not meet the required level of scholarship there. The result is that the urge for knowledge met with in the average lending library is likely to be diffuse and unfocused, requiring the assistance of expert bibliographers to give it what might perhaps be called directional stability.

It is clear that this type of reader will require a somewhat different class of reading material from the reader of a special library, who is generally seeking the most advanced work in his subject. At this stage, therefore, it is more important to provide crystallised thought-energy, that is the material that has become approved and semi-permanent, and which is recorded in books. By means of books, the reader whose impulse towards knowledge is as yet unfocused can be shown a path already mapped out and approved by those engaged on advanced work on the subject. In these days, new discoveries are often first recorded, not in books, but in one of the periodicals, where they are then the target for comment and criticism in letters. Another means is in a paper read to one of the societies, where discussion takes place among the members. These comments and discussions may lead to modifications in the light of the

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experience of others. Thus it happens that new material is rarely recorded in book form until it has reached a certain degree of stability, and is, as far as the most advanced workers are concerned, sometimes out-of-date.

This does not mean, of course, that public libraries should confine their attention to books, but that special and public libraries, in addition to catering for a somewhat different class of reader, tend to place a different emphasis on the various types of material. For the public library, books are probably more important than periodicals, though the reverse may be true of the special library. Because the urge for knowledge is encountered at an earlier and more unorganised stage, too, the problems are somewhat different, though basically the function is of course the same. It is to provide for the reader the right material at the right time, in order that his thought-processes may re-organise in the light of new knowledge, and carry him a step forward along the path of learning which he has chosen. In this way he can reach a greater degree of self-expression, and a greater skill in organising his life to the best advantage.

From this, it would seem that the public library carries a greater responsibility, and one which has so far only partly been recognised. We perceive that the library is of value to the community, but do not sufficiently understand the character of this value, nor how to increase it. The result is that the professional studies which the assistant makes do little more than glance at the problem which actually lies at the foundation of all library practice—that of interpreting recorded knowledge for the benefit of those who wish to use it. Attention is concentrated instead on those technical processes which have been made the hidden craft of librarianship, and which

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are now being brought out into the light of research, examined and mechanised. In Brown's day, fierce controversy raged over the principle of open access. Today, an automatic system of charging and discharging has received a pilot try-out at Walthamstow.¹ The Samain and other electronic sorting machines, and the Bush Rapid Selector, have possibilities not yet fully explored in the arrangement and re-arrangement of material as index entries, while the resources of television are incorporated in Ultrafax.² It is not too much to expect that in another generation or two most of the processes on which our present technical skill is based will be done by machines. If we are content to drift along, ignoring the implications of the law that books are for use, it may well be that the profession of librarian will dwindle in status to that of a machine-minder.

But no machine yet devised or even hinted at can take the place of the human mind in the task of interpreting books so that they will stimulate the thought-processes in another's mind to produce a higher level of culture. Ranganathan has well said that the librarian is the personality lacking in the written word, and this must undoubtedly be the professional function of the future.³ Freed from the shackles of routine problems of acquisition and arrangement, he will be able to devote the major part of his time and energy to personal assistance to readers.

It is not surprising that most of the public are as yet

¹ Leyland, E., *Library Association Record*, Vol. 52, 1950, p. 112.

² *J. Documentation*, Vol. 4, 1949, p. 248.

³ Cf. the paper on *Reference service and humanism*: "Service to living men should at the ultimate stage be done only by living men".

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unaware that the librarian ought to fill this role of interpreter, since it is not emphasised in professional training. Even those who actively wish for assistance, and have so far made the effort to satisfy their need as to reach the library, hesitate to approach an apparently busy member of the staff with a request. It is quite common for an assistant to be hindered by the reader's attitude of fearing to waste staff time, and it is true to say that many of the public do not know that assistants should help them in their searches, that they are in the library for that very purpose. They seem to be convinced that, in order to deal with their request, work of greater importance must be put aside. Not only must the attitude of the profession be changed, therefore, but the change must also be transmitted to the minds of the readers. This is not difficult to achieve. A minor stir was created by the appointment at one library of a Readers' Adviser, with specific duties and unhampered by having to deal with the normal routine administrative duties which usually fall to the lot of the enquiry desk assistant. The Luton librarian, discussing this appointment at the 1948 conference of the Library Association, called it "an experiment in its infancy", and the leading article in a professional journal was devoted to it. Immediately, the response from the public was even greater than had been anticipated, demonstrating the value of the service, and, in fact, proving that it was a necessity. It need never be feared that there will be a lack of response if the right staff are provided: this is one of the few aspects on which all those who are operating this kind of service are unanimous.

Before this can be done adequately, however, the staff must be made aware of the level of request that they are

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likely to meet. Under the present educational system, it is comparatively easy to classify readers in certain groups, and to indicate the stage to which their advance has progressed. The position of the research worker has already been sketched in his dependence on a university or special library, but already it can be foreseen that there will be a greater degree of co-operation between the different types of library, and this aspect of the study should not, of course, be neglected.

In order to view the situation in as nearly as possible the same way as the reader, the natural place to begin the study of readers' needs is in the children's library. It should be evident that these should all have their own request service, but this is unfortunately a rare phenomenon, and has been little commented on in the literature, with the outstanding exception of the writings of D. I. Colley.⁴ ⁵ Child users of the library are just emerging from the stage when their knowledge comes from direct experience. They know enough of the world to be able to make up their own stories, and are always in search of new knowledge to widen the sweep of their imagination. Children react to well-told stories, of whatever content; they are more interested in people than things. The technique of children's librarianship is already developing along the right lines, thanks to the efforts of a small but enthusiastic group of workers, and to the encouragement of a few of the leading members of the profession, who realise that this department is perhaps the most important in the system. With puppet theatres, play-reading and acting groups, the characters in literature

⁴ *Library Assistant*, Vol. 40, 1947, p. 86.

⁵ Papers and summaries of discussion, L.A. Conference, 1948, p. 53.

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and history can be made to take on a very real existence for the children, who then see them facing life and experience as living people, and so can understand the stories from the basis of their own experience.

By means of story hours, which are often held by the children themselves, an increased degree of realism is brought into literature through the agency of the human reader or tale-teller. The function of story-teller is usually found to be a characteristic of the culture of primitive peoples, who gain a greater appreciation of the significance of the narrative through the human emotions seen to be expressed in fact and not simply on the printed page. As with great acting, of course, the degree to which the narrator succeeds depends on the extent to which he is able to convert the particular circumstances portrayed into a representation having general application, which can be understood by the hearers in terms of their own experience.

Of equal importance is the work which is done in co-operation with teachers, and the organisation of various kinds of clubs which stimulate the use of books. These fulfil the purpose of relating the library to those parts of the child's life which occupy most of his intellect—the school and hobbies. In all these activities, the task of the children's librarian is the same: to interpret written knowledge in such a way that it has a direct relationship to the children's own experience, so that they can progress from the knowledge-through-experience stage to the point where they themselves are able to carry out this interpretation through the power of their own imagination. This development takes place during the period of their using the children's library, and the staff must be aware of it and adjust their technique accordingly.

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In this way, the transition from the junior to the adult library can be easily bridged by a carefully planned request service which is adjusted to cope with all stages of human personality, and to meet the needs of each with the correct approach. Thus the service begins in one department at the point where it left the other. It is relatively unimportant whether an adolescent library is provided or not; what matters is that the staffs of the junior and adult sections should work in close co-operation leaving no gap to be covered by the reader. Liaison with schools, for example, should be continued in the adult library, so that needs arising from the progress of education which cannot be adequately dealt with in the junior can still be met. The raising of the school-leaving age presents librarians with an outstanding opportunity for assisting those nearing the end of their schooldays, by searching out material for projects, by providing sets of plays from the British Drama League, and by generally making evident the enormous range of information in books, and so for helping to focus the interests of the pupils on a path of life which appeals to them and which they can tread with benefit and satisfaction.⁶

The university student has taken a great step forward in selecting the field of study which he wishes to cultivate and seeks to gain a thorough knowledge of accepted thought within a fairly narrow compass. The degree of specialisation varies with the type of qualification sought; for an honours degree it is higher than for a general degree; but this does not significantly affect the approach

⁶ There is a useful survey of some of this kind of work in a paper by Miss M. J. P. Lawrence, Project and activity in connection with the school library, *The School Librarian*, Vol. 5, No. 1, March 1950, pp. 10-16.

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made to the library. Students have highly qualified guidance in their studies, and require material to which their attention has already been directed, since their courses are planned in accordance with a given curriculum. They should be capable of using the library themselves, rather than merely using the books which they are given; that is to say, they should be prepared to understand the shelf arrangement, and to get to know where to look for works relevant to their subjects. Indeed, there is a very strong movement, particularly among science teachers, for the acceptance into the curriculum of instruction in the use of the library and its bibliographical tools.

It will usually be found that students make their requests for specific items which they have not found on the shelves or in the catalogue, and the inter-library loan scheme is invaluable for them. It is for this class of reader, too, that subscriptions to such libraries as that of H. K. Lewis will be found necessary. Students are rightly expected to buy most of the textbooks needed for constant reference, but there are also a great many which are required for consultation or for use during a limited period, and these should be supplied by the public library. It should not be forgotten, too, that a work which is a basic text for one subject is almost always needed for consultation by students of others, and the library should therefore try to hold in its stock as wide a selection as possible of all the recognised textbooks. A very useful service can be given by consultations with local technical colleges and other institutions of higher education, which will prove to them that the public library is serious in its intention to provide books for use.

The service should naturally be prepared to continue

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into the post-graduate stage, though the use of basic material will probably decrease as the researcher is entering a field which is not covered to a great extent in existing literature. By this time, his interests will be more or less accurately focused, and he will be making increasing use of special libraries or the great reference libraries like the British Museum or the Patent Office. He will still, however, need less advanced works on marginal topics, and here the subject approach will continue. The important thing is that by growing up in the habit of receiving help from the public library, he will know that it is in a library that he must look for information. He will appreciate that a librarian, by virtue of his profession, is capable of giving bibliographical assistance to readers at any level of study. He will also have a fair idea of what type of library to consult to the best advantage, a point which is constantly arising in discussions on the dissemination of technical information.

For the average reader, however, it is on the cessation of formal, full-time education that the public library assumes its greatest importance, since it should be in a position to satisfy all his requirements, and because he will be unlikely to have ready access to any other type of service. These requirements fall into a number of categories, connected with occupational studies, hobbies, cultural interests; or they may be derived from the many, often unexpected, problems that occur in the ordinary course of living. All these possibilities can only be prepared for by the organisation of a reference service whose staff fully realise the implications lying behind every request, and can therefore produce the right type of information to suit each reader.

Of these, the first group, connected with occupational

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studies, will probably present the greatest difficulty, because in an advanced civilisation there is not only an enormous variety of occupations, but also a high degree of literacy, bringing with it a strong desire for self-improvement. The attitude of mind of such readers should readily be comprehended, as most library assistants themselves are, or have been at some stage, engaged upon such studies for the purpose of passing the Association's examinations. Profit can also be gained from the experience of special librarians. The level of occupational studies is likely to be lower in the public library, and it will usually be found that a correct use of reference sources will provide the solution to a request. It is not suggested that every library should subscribe to *Chemical Abstracts*, although this is already done in some of the larger systems, and no really advanced information service can be without it and the abstracting journals in other fields. The H. W. Wilson Indexes, however, are exactly suited to this type of research—indeed, this is what they are produced for—and they should be at hand on every request service desk. *The Subject Index to Periodicals* is well known and is quite useful, particularly in the arts, but it suffers from the great disadvantage of always being some time in arrears because it is only published as an annual volume.

It is important, too, that the staff should be familiar with at least the better known periodicals, so that they are aware of advances being made in as many spheres as possible. Part of their duties, therefore, should be to scan the current issues of these journals, not only for book selection as at present, but also in order to acquire some acquaintance with their contents. Not nearly enough time is yet allowed to assistants for reading, and in fact

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it is not only in jest that librarians "never have time for reading". This failure to keep acquainted with the tools of the trade, generally considered odd in other professions, is apparently a sign of active devotion to duty in librarians. But of course, if the staff is adequate, such work can easily be shared out according to interest, and this will ensure that the reader can meet with an intelligent reaction when making a request. No doubt many librarians may feel aghast at the cost that this would entail, but when request services have become generally accepted, it should be the aim of every public library to provide specialists in the major arts and sciences, and it may then be possible to institute a system of consultants such as exists in the Library of Congress. The division of the library into subject departments with specialists, long advocated by Savage, means that it would become in effect a series of special libraries, capable of carrying out a much more intensive reference service, with adequate documentation at the level of thought-units and not merely at the level of books.

The other categories of request should not present the same problems, since they may well be within the experience of the staff as human beings. Most hobbies, for example, have been taken up at some period or other, and in any case their literature is not so vast as to preclude the possibility of all the staff being familiar with at least the best works on each. Cultural interests will almost certainly not require special training, as the average assistant has a fairly broad appreciation of the arts, and much of the library's extension work is likely to be of this nature.

For the type of request arising from the day-by-day business of living, it has been found that special indexes

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of out-of-the-way information, which should be kept at all service desks, are often the quickest and easiest means of finding a satisfactory answer, linked with an intelligent use of the stock and the classification system.⁷ Such requests are unlikely to be very technical, and usually require familiarity with books on domestic economy and the files of a journal like *The Woodworker*. Experience is probably the best guide here, and after a few months' work on the request service desk, the assistant will certainly be competent to deal with the majority of requests of this category. It may be well, though, to add some explanation on the use of the classification system, since it has sometimes been suggested that the study of classification theory is unnecessary, and that the assistant should concentrate instead on the actual business of assistance to readers.

It is fairly evident, in fact, that there is insufficient grasp of the primary function of classification: to arrange library materials in an order which is helpful to the user. The way in which this is carried out may be divided into two stages; first, the selection of an order which corresponds to the way in which the material can be used to the best advantage, and second, the matching of this order with a mechanising device, the notation. The theory of classification consists of understanding how this order is arrived at, that is analysing each subject into its fundamental aspects, and then discovering how the maker of the classification has contrived to make his notation express this order. This understanding is essential to the skilled reference assistant, in order that he may be able to

⁷ This is commented on by C. B. Freeman, *The Librarian*, Vol. 38, 1949, pp. 105-108 and 134-136, and by D. R. Pfoutz, *Library Journal*, Vol. 73, 1948, p. 1638.

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place a request in its correct relation to its special field, of knowledge and show some recognition of the subdivisions of that field. Failure to do this immediately shows up the assistant as ignorant, and as Professor Jaques Barzun has said: "When you pile up omissions . . . you begin to have an uncomfortable sense that the person is not well-read or well-educated. And such persons . . . do not, as I see it, belong in libraries".*

The object of this background is to ensure that there exists a community of interest and knowledge, however small, between the readers and the staff, which brings with it an understanding of why a request has been made. The importance of this appears to be often overlooked, in practice if not in theory. Yet it can hardly be over-emphasised; every reader rightly expects a sympathetic attention when making a request, and this cannot be given if the assistant is totally ignorant of either the reason why it is made or of the area of knowledge into which it falls. Good technique may help to cover up such ignorance, but there cannot be a satisfactory contact between reader and staff without some degree of shared knowledge. Where it exists, it is certainly valued. Sir John Barbirolli epitomised this aspect in his speech at the re-opening of the Henry Watson Music Library on September 16th, 1947:

"I have known libraries where they hand you books and music with about the same degree of alacrity with which you might obtain an order for exhumation. . . .

"Earlier on I talked of this as a 'living library' . . . the books and music seem eager to come to you,

* "The Scholar looks at the Library", *College and Research Libraries*, Vol. 7, 1946, pp. 113-7.

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and help you on your way. This is of course due to the inspiration of Mr. John Russell and his splendid staff, without whom a library of this sort would be useless." *

* Reported in *Manchester Review*, Vol. 4, 1947, p. 399.

CHAPTER IV

THE NATURE OF THE SERVICE

THERE IS, unfortunately, some confusion about the true nature of the lending library request service and its importance to the community. In this respect, the library profession is not alone in underestimating its potential value: "We have as yet scarcely begun to visualise the contribution which the professions could offer to the better ordering of society, or to the ways in which their knowledge and experience could be put most effectively at the service of society".¹ There is considerable evidence, however, to show that other professions, particularly in the sciences, are reconsidering their social function, and examining ways in which they could increase their value. Librarians need have no fear that their usefulness cannot be increased, since other professions do not hesitate to admit their dependence on library services. Thus at the Scientific Information Conference, it was resolved that "Science rests upon its published record, and ready access to public scientific and technical information is a fundamental need for scientists everywhere. All bars which prevent access to scientific and technical publications hinder the progress of science and should be removed." It might be objected that the type of information meant is beyond the scope of public libraries, and that it is in the special libraries that the improvements required by the

¹ *Nature*, Vol. 164, 29th October, 1949, p. 724 (Editorial).

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resolution should be made. Undoubtedly the Conference was mainly concerned with special libraries; but equally certainly the public library should take all knowledge as its field rather than submit to the stigma that the most important parts of the record are too advanced for its capabilities. In any case, the attitude of mind which could produce such a resolution is by no means confined to the sciences, and has been even more emphatically expressed by men of letters. Georges Duhamel, for example, has asserted that "dans les conditions actuelles du monde humaine, la destinée de notre civilisation est liée à la destinée du livre".²

If the importance of the librarian's stock is regarded so highly by others, it would indeed be shameful if no steps were taken by the profession to join in the general revaluation to discover methods of improving the service. Nor is this regard confined to the stock; it is becoming increasingly realised that an intermediary is required between the reader and the flood of publications now being poured out on all subjects. Members of all professions acknowledge their debt to recorded knowledge and at the same time their dependence on librarianship becomes clear to them. "Librarianship is useful to mankind. In making the printed word available, the librarian unlocks the knowledge of the past so that it can be used as a guide to the future".³ If the profession does not conform to these high expectations, it will not only disappoint those who wish to depend on it, but it will also have failed to fulfil its historical role in the development of society.

² *Défense des lettres*, 9th edition, 1936, p. 51.

³ Bauer, H. C., A new field for scientists, *Educational Record*, Vol. 27, No. 4, October 1946, p. 433.

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In the past, it was accepted that a librarian should be a scholar, and scientists of the rank of Leibnitz and Priestley were not ashamed to spend part of their careers as librarians. "The duties and qualifications of a librarian" was the title of a discourse pronounced in the general assembly of the Sorbonne, on the 23rd December, 1780, by Jean-Baptiste Cotton des Houssayes, in which he emphasised the fact that "the superintendent of a library, whatever be its character, should be no stranger to any part of learning".⁴ This discourse, in fact, is remarkable for its penetrating analysis, and should be thoroughly studied by all students of librarianship. It contains many suggestions which even today are not honoured as they should be.

All this backwardness probably arises from a misplaced emphasis on the true craft of the librarian. It has often been pointed out that the way to seniority lies along the path of administration rather than of assistance to readers, which is not surprising when the average level of lending library service is considered. It has been felt sufficient to put the books on the shelves and open the doors so that those who feel like it can come and get them. Therefore, the kind of contact made normally with readers over the service counter is rarely established at a high mental level. The mechanics of book issuing are obviously well within the compass of any junior, and even the management of a handful of lending library staff is a matter of less difficulty than that of a small shop. Moreover, when there is no supply of skilled reference service, there cannot be any demand; as has been seen, the urge for knowledge is often too frail to withstand the deadening effect of receiving poorly equipped and often

⁴ Edited by J. C. Dana and H. W. Kent, Chicago, 1906.

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divided attention. Thus the objective of the best librarians is to leave the lending department, where there is no opportunity either for advancement or for the exercise of their skill, and to be "promoted" to the cataloguing department or to one of the administrative offices. With this kind of background, far too often a senior position is reached without ever coming in contact with the real needs of the public, or ever appreciating the level to which the lending library can attain if an adequate service is given. "It must be clear that the librarian who has become an impersonal administrator has disqualified himself from exercising some of the most important functions of his job."⁵ Consequently the work done by administrators is not directed along the right lines, and while it is considered sufficient to appoint readers' advisers at the lowest level of professional salaries, undue importance is attached to cataloguing and administration, and attempts to introduce economies there meet with fierce resistance. For example, an immense amount of unproductive labour could be saved by co-operative cataloguing and classifying; yet the possibilities of using the British National Bibliography as a catalogue are dismissed without discussion, almost with contempt.

This is further illustrated by the arguments in favour of simplified cataloguing and broad classification. It is contended that readers do not understand the use of these tools, and that it is only in the Reference Department that they are necessary, an opinion which is surely based on lack of understanding of the reader's approach. It must be clear that, because a trained librarian is provided in the Reference Department, enquiries of an advanced

⁵ Adams, R. G., *Librarians as enemies of books*, *Library Quarterly*, Vol. 7, No. 3, July 1937, p. 331.

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nature are normally dealt with there, and the staff, who use the catalogue and classification system on behalf of the readers, are perfectly aware of the deficiencies of simplification. It does not seem to be considered that the lending library users may also find it inadequate, and as Savage puts it, stay away because the library has failed them. If only the author approach is catered for, then it is clear that a simple author catalogue will be quite satisfactory for finding purposes. But if, as is usually the case, a reader is seeking information on a specific aspect of a subject, he does not wish to have to search through shelves of books on other aspects of the same subject, all bearing the same class number; nor does he wish to push through dozens of catalogue cards, all carrying the same heading, to discover whether the stock holds anything on his aspect. Lack of understanding is far more likely to arise from such jumbles than from the clear statement of resources given by close classifying and detailed cataloguing. The whole function of these two techniques is to show up material, in helpful order, at the right level to suit each request; and if they are misused by simplification, they set the user precisely on the road to that chaos which we are told is represented by the unclassified library.

The true craft of librarianship, therefore, lies in the work of the library itself, among the books and in contact with the readers, and it is there that the true librarian should be found. "He will never," says Des Houssayes, "seek to steal away from the notice of all into some solitary or unknown retreat" and again, "It is impossible, in fact, to attach too much importance to the advantages resulting from an intelligent and methodical order in the arrangement of a library". If such skilled staff are

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provided in the lending department, they will soon realise, like their reference colleagues, that they require the best tools for their work; indeed, it will be even clearer to them, since they do not have the whole of the stock always at their disposal. A great deal of it is always out on loan, and they are therefore obliged to rely on catalogues and bibliographies in their selection of material against a specific request.

It is known, of course, that many libraries have begun to operate a "Readers' Advisory Service", but the stationery that has been devised shows that there is as yet only a shadowy vision of the implications of the service. Two outstanding points that are generally found are (a) no provision for recording a subject request, which shows unfamiliarity with what really goes on, since this is the most common type, and (b) no attempt to co-ordinate the work with that of branch libraries and so save time by eliminating secondary records such as inter-branch notes and memoranda. Smugness might be countered, in fact, by an illuminating description of a fruitless attempt to find details of a minor Venetian painter: the writer sets down faithfully all the mishaps which librarians tend sometimes to think are only to be found in other services.⁶

All aspects of the service will now be examined in some detail, to indicate how it can be the keystone of the work of the library, to which all the technical and administrative sections are contributory. The function of the staff is to act as guides to the library, and to help the reader make the best use of it, and this can well be summed up in a single phrase: to translate a request into a catalogue entry.

⁶ The research magnificent, *Apollo*, Vol. 47, No. 285, November 1948, p. 102.

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It does not matter if the catalogue is that of the library itself, or of another library, or is a bibliography. Readers are generally unconcerned about the precise source of their information; the thing is to get that information, as quickly as possible. One criticism that has often been made of this type of service is that it wastes the time of the staff doing for readers what they can do for themselves. The answer is, of course, that it is the function of the staff because readers at all levels are not generally trained in the organisation of their material and need assistance, firstly in order to show them how their lack of knowledge can be amended by reference to recorded information, and secondly, to organise the supply of that information. If there is no help, this lack will never be amended, because the urge will die. The term "at all levels" is used, because no matter how trivial or advanced the nature of the knowledge required may be, the reader is almost always unaware of its existence, though he may be well acquainted with literature at other levels. There is a tendency, with regard to books, to accept as commonplace that which we know from experience, and to meet with surprise the bibliographical resources of other fields previously unknown to us. Thus a research chemist will think little of obtaining data from Beilstein or Gmelin, but will be filled with admiration for the librarian who produces Ackerman's *Picturesque tour of the English Lakes* via the National Central Library, or obtains from Spon's *Workshop Receipts* a method of riveting broken china.

Further, the attitude of rejecting requests of a "trivial nature" shows that the service is not viewed as an integral part of the working of the library, but as a fortuitous elaboration, to be dealt with by purely *ad hoc*

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methods. Most librarians of integrity insist that they should not take on the role of censor over what is added to the stock. Yet they seem aware of no inconsistency when assuming the duty of censoring the importance of requests. It is of no use to build up a small circle of satisfied advanced readers, if the majority of would-be users have been frightened away because their first requests were considered trivial. They are, in fact, much more likely to think that if the library fails them in small matters, what is the good of approaching it with great? To any reader, his request is the most important matter in the entire library at that time, and since the staff are there for the benefit of the public, obviously they should give him their best attention. And, of course, a simple request is simple to solve, so that very little time will be taken anyway.

Once the assistant has taken the request, and has performed where necessary the translation into a given work, the first action is to see what is available. If then unsatisfied, the request falls into one of three traditional categories: reserves, suggestions, and loans from other libraries. The first covers books in stock but out on loan; the second, books which will be added to the stock by purchase; the third, books which will be borrowed from another library through the regional library service. The fact that a different system usually exists for treating each of these categories is a sign of the *ad hoc* nature of the service, for to the reader they all appear, as indeed they all are, one and the same—obtaining a work which is not available at the time of making the request. It is a matter of utter indifference to him whether the book is already in stock but on loan, is about to be bought, or will be borrowed from another library.

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It cannot be over-stressed that, from the reader's point of view, all these services are the same. His request is made because he is unable to find the right material on the shelves and requires the skilled assistance of the librarian. If there is indeed nothing available which will satisfy his need, bibliographical work is necessary to select an appropriate work, and it does not matter whether it is in stock or not. In many cases, where requests are made for newly-published works, it is unlikely that they will yet be on the shelves. This does not alter the nature of the service. Nor does it matter if the book is borrowed through the regional system. To the reader, the source of his material is of no concern whatsoever, and the library service consists of supplying it by any possible means. This applies equally to "suggestions", for which there is often no provision made at all, and which are sometimes held to be impertinence on the reader's part in attempting to do the librarian's job for him. Fortunately, this attitude is dying out, but the whole idea of "suggestions" should be eradicated also. To try to differentiate between these categories for the purpose of the organisation means introducing unnecessary complications. For instance, when a new book is added to the stock, at some stage it will change from a "suggestion" into a "reserve", when there is a list of readers waiting for it. This means a decision to change the record, a waste of the assistant's thinking time, adding nothing whatever to the efficiency of the service.

In considering these categories, it should be constantly borne in mind that the majority of requests will not be for a specific work, in the first place. There will, of course, be many such, especially when it becomes known that requests for new books are welcomed, and their

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number will become a useful guide to the likely demand. But the subject request is by far the most common, and much of the time of the staff is spent in searching the various bibliographical tools and catalogues for a suitable title. It is in this kind of search that the cumulated *British National Biography* will prove of most value; the lack of a classified list of current English works has long been keenly felt, and it will be one of the most useful of all bibliographies. When cumulated and equipped with author and subject indexes, it will be equivalent to a complete classified catalogue of such works, and from 1950 onwards might well take the place of the library's own catalogues, at a far smaller cost, especially in branches. If all the libraries in a system are treated as a whole for the purposes of book stock, a shelf list is sufficient to indicate what is available within the system.⁷

The relation of the request service to the other departments of the library has been the cause of some controversy, and several letters, some of them quite heated, have appeared in the professional press, as if the handling of requests in the lending section were "poaching" on the work of the reference section. This is an inevitable outcome of that part of the public library tradition which has condemned the lending librarian to be a "keeper" of books, and has ignored the importance of his work. The practice in many libraries is to refer serious or difficult enquiries (subject enquiries, in fact) to the reference department staff, and even in the U.S.A., where their own type of Readers' Advisory Service is

⁷ This is advocated by W. B. Paton in his paper on Economics and Efficiency, p. 43. Library Association. Proceedings of the Annual Conference. Edinburgh, 1951.

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widely in use, it has been found that there is a certain amount of overlapping between reference and lending requests.⁸ Where there is a clear-cut organisation based on the type of information likely to be sought in the two departments, however, there is little difficulty in distinguishing between them, and there should in any case be close co-operation between the two staffs to secure the maximum efficiency in dealing with any request. If adequate provision is made in the lending library, readers who wish for material to take home and study will always make their requests there, and so leave the reference section to concentrate on questions which they can answer with specific items of information. In any case, once the request has been put to the lending service, that service should control it to its conclusion. It is a waste of time to pass it back and forth, as is done in some places when a bibliographical search is necessary owing to the location of all the bibliographies in the reference department. The fewer hands that are involved in a request, the more satisfactorily it will be cleared. This is one of the few instances in which small libraries such as branch libraries are in a more fortunate position than the average central library, since their lending and reference sections are generally combined and operated by the same staff.

Requests for new books will prove a valuable aid to book selection. Once readers become accustomed to receiving attention, and are satisfied that their requests are automatically given special treatment, they will have no hesitation in bringing in new titles which they would like to see added to the library. For them, as has been pointed out, it is the same service, the obtaining of books which

⁸ Hutchins, M., *Introduction to reference work*, 1944.

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are not available at the time. In this way, it is often possible for the Book Selection Committee to have as much as several months' advance notice of a new work because it has been mentioned in a specialised periodical, or because the reader is a member of a professional body and thereby knows of forthcoming publications. From these requests, it is possible to form some estimate of the number of copies which will be required, and any guide to book selection which is so directly related to the probable use of the book is naturally to be encouraged.

Gaps in the stock will be very quickly discovered by the number of requests received within any class. If all enquiries are routed through the same channel, the staff soon get to know what subjects are inadequately covered, and by viewing the requests over a period of time, they will be able also to form an estimate of the permanence of the demand, an important factor in a long-term policy of stock-building.

Since so much of the work depends on the use of the catalogues by the staff, it will also be possible to co-operate with the cataloguing department in suggesting improvements, particularly in the form of annotations and the choice of subject headings. Both of these are highly skilled tasks, but if they can be related to the way in which the catalogue is actually used by the readers, they can undoubtedly be done more simply and more effectively. The request service staff, by becoming a sort of microcosm of readers' needs, will be able to see the catalogue in the same way as the public, and so will come to know exactly what they require of it, for the easier selection of the right book. The importance of annotation needs no emphasis: it is obvious that readers and staff will only be baffled by a number of cards, all

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apparently on the same subject, bearing merely an author and title without any indication as to the scope and contents of the work. When the selection of a possible answer to a subject request has to be done by means of bibliographical work, it is essential to provide as many guides as possible to aid the choice.

As far as the form of catalogue is concerned, it is becoming generally recognised that for all forms of reference service the classified arrangement is the most efficient. It possesses the power, in the hands of skilled staff, of showing not only the resources of the stock in a given subject, but of demonstrating the relations of that subject to others having an important bearing on it which may contain books relevant to the request in hand. Just as it is the function of the classification to help the reader to understand more of the area of a class, revealing relationships of which he was not perhaps aware, so the classified catalogue can perform this office in respect of actual books. The dictionary arrangement is quite unable to do more than show the works on each specific subject, and is really only adequate for author enquiries. The main objection to the classified form is that readers do not understand it, that it is therefore difficult for them to use, and that it hinders them in their searches. But it is without doubt more satisfactory to the reader to see a systematic arrangement which corresponds to that on the shelves, than to have to leap from one part of the catalogue to another quite unrelated to it in pursuit of "see" and "see also" references to the various aspects of each subject. For those who merely wish to find the location of a certain book or subject, the author and subject indexes will suffice, and as these are alphabetical, the much-quoted danger of misunderstanding should not

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arise. The classified catalogue can do all that a dictionary catalogue can do, and very much more.

It may be thought that some of these remarks are contrary in intention to the suggestion that the B.N.B. could come into use as an alternative to locally constructed catalogues. Should this step be taken, the reader will have a classified catalogue, not of the library's stock only, but of all books published in the United Kingdom from 1950 onwards. Consequently when it is being consulted, the reader will have a far wider choice; nor need it be objected that the library's own stock may be overlooked and unnecessary work passed on to the regional bureau. A correct search will have already revealed what is immediately available, and if the reader has to wait, it is immaterial whether his book is reserved or borrowed. The shelf list can always be used as a check against the selection. The main point, as will be seen in the discussion on procedure, is that the search will be so organised that once any step has been taken without success, the assistant can go on to the next confident that he will not have to retrace his steps. If the routine is reliable, there is little danger of overlooking any source.

There is one final point that ought perhaps to be mentioned. A readers' advisory service has been described in which the adviser is installed in a separate office outside the library itself.⁹ The duties are more of an "advisory" nature, perhaps, and consist mainly of preparing courses of reading, merely indicating where the books may be found, and not actually handling them; this is left to the circulation staff. It may be that this type of organisation is necessary in a library the size of

⁹ Flexner, J. M., and Edge, S. A., *The Readers' Advisory Service*, 1934.

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the New York Public Library, but it is not recommended for the average English system. In order to integrate the many aspects of the service, the books themselves should be handled, and the personal contacts so made, at the beginning and end of each request, have a definite value in increasing the use made by the public. It has been well put in a letter to the *Library Association Record*: "On no account must the readers' adviser's desk be outside the lending library, as it is the focal point of the lending library service. Readers must be able to speak to the librarian there with the minimum of effort on their part. This is not a service apart, but a vital link in the lending library."¹⁰

¹⁰ Vol. 51, No. 12, December 1949, p. 399, Letter from L. C. Guy.

CHAPTER V

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ONE OF THE MAIN FAILINGS of many attempts to provide a request service in the lending library springs from the type of assistant used to staff it. This in turn is derived from the traditional pre-occupation with the author approach. As the lending library services have been generally based on this, and because it is comparatively easy to find out from a catalogue if a named author's works are available, there has been a tendency either to leave all assistance to be given by the counter staff, or to allow a senior to carry out these duties in time spared from other administrative work. Where the subject approach is anticipated, in the reference department, a senior is almost always provided, with no other duties to distract his attention from enquiries. Here, it is appreciated that bibliographical searches are often necessary, and that they cannot be made capably by an unqualified junior. On the other hand, when only the author approach is anticipated, it is considered to be a not very difficult task to satisfy readers, and one of these two alternatives is made the basis of the request service. Sometimes, there is not even a separate desk at which enquiries may be made; sometimes, a desk is provided but is only staffed haphazardly. It is quite definitely inadequate to rely on counter staff to handle requests. They have many routine jobs to do, and are always liable to be interrupted by an

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impatient queue waiting to have their books discharged. The result is that the reader goes on into the library to try to sort out his own query, or merely gives up the effort. In cases like this, so far from encouraging the quest for knowledge, the library does not a little to stifle it at the moment of entering.

Nor is it sufficient to allow a senior assistant to give his part-time attention. It is well-known that the readers are still shy of disturbing an apparently busy librarian, to take him away from his work to offer them assistance in what they may feel is a trivial matter—especially to the librarian, for what interest can he have in their problems? Furthermore, it is definitely not conducive to a helpful attitude in the staff themselves. Even to an experienced and sympathetic assistant, enquiries can sometimes be a nuisance, for example if an important bibliography has to be left to find material on a subject in which he is not interested! It is much more likely to be so if he is engaged on urgent administrative work, if this comprises his allocated job, and has to leave it to deal with a casual request that he probably feels need not have been made if the reader had taken the trouble to look in the catalogue.

The first important point about the staffing of the service, therefore, is that an assistant must always be on duty in the library, at a clearly-designated desk, for the purpose of dealing with requests, and *for that purpose only*. This function should be separate from that of the assistant who handles the administration of the department; whether senior or equal or junior is not of particular importance, so long as it is separate. It does not matter, either, if the two types of work are shared, providing that the request assistant does not have to engage on

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administrative work while on duty at the enquiry desk. In this way, readers will soon get to know that their wants will always receive prior attention if they are made known at the right place, and they will then develop the right attitude themselves, as in shops; that is, they will *expect* to be able to make their wants known.

The second point, of equal if not of greater importance, concerns the personality of the assistant. It should be clear that this work requires a considerable effort of thought on the part of the staff, thought moreover which is constantly being switched from one subject to another to meet requests from all types of reader, made in all types of ways. If these are to be received in a manner that encourages the desire for knowledge, so that the readers return with other requests, a very great responsibility rests upon the recipient. It is vital to the success of the service that, whenever a request is made, it should be given sympathetic and courteous attention. The qualities of patience, courtesy and thoroughness are indeed more important to the reader than technical ability accompanied by a churlish manner; this may satisfy the first request, but will scarcely attract a second. With the right organisation to back him up, a less qualified assistant can, if he feels himself insufficiently equipped technically, make a record of the request for a more skilled colleague to deal with later. What is essential is to give the reader the feeling that his enquiry is received with goodwill and care. If he knows this, he will leave with the satisfaction of knowing also that he has passed over the responsibility of finding the answer, and need no longer ponder it in his own mind. Thereby, his desire for knowledge will be stimulated, and the library will have fulfilled its social purpose.

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In order to give each reader sympathetic attention, it is necessary for the staff to have a full understanding of the thought-mechanisms which produce a request, and the background to the type of knowledge desired. An essential quality, therefore, is the ability to attune oneself with the reader to discover his real need, and in order to do this, the staff must be sufficiently senior to have the mental equipment necessary to visualise what lies behind the making of the request. An impression of maturity as well as of sympathy must be given, since it is unlikely that a serious enquirer would feel induced to make his request known to an assistant who does not seem likely to understand it.

With all these qualities in mind, it becomes clear that the job is in reality "the best job for the best man on the staff". If it is adequately organised and adequately paid, it offers interesting, skilled and important work to the most highly trained and educated members of the profession, and would almost certainly attract university graduates far more than the prospect of routine administration. One of the resolutions of the Scientific Information Conference was that the research librarian should be considered equal in status to his scientific colleagues. If the opportunity is offered for this type of work in the department which comes into most frequent contact with the public, librarianship can be made an important factor in the life of the whole community as well as in the research laboratory.

All this should not be taken to mean that there is no place at all for the junior staff in the operation of the service. They should always be regarded as in training, however, and not as the operators of the service. When it becomes well known and widely used, there will be a

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large amount of routine work which cannot be avoided, and which can and should be done by less qualified assistants. One of the great objections often levelled at this type of service stems from that feeling of consideration for the welfare of the junior staff which so seldom takes any practical form. It is that if every request must be directed to the enquiry desk and handled there, juniors will lose their only opportunity of dealing with the more interesting class of library activity. Those who have worked in (or used) a busy public lending library know only too well just how much individual attention a harassed junior is able to give, with other impatient borrowers waiting to be served, and a number of reserves or queries to be searched for in the issue. A reader asking for material on the uses of aluminium in the food industries will scarcely be gratified by a wave of the hand in the general direction of Useful Arts.

There is, in fact, a good deal to be gained from using junior staff for some of the work, and it is recommended that they be given the chance of assisting at the enquiry desk, under supervision, as this forms an invaluable part of their training, and also ensures continuity in the service over a long period of time. There will certainly be a number of requests which they are competent to handle, such as those for specific works which are known to be already in stock, for many recreational works, and in fact for that class of book which is approached along "author" lines—the class which has been thought to be the only one encountered in the lending library, and which does not require a great deal of experience to deal with. The routine duties which can also be done by juniors include filing, making out applications on the correct form for loans from the regional bureau, and

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despatching notifications to readers that requested works are ready for collection. But it must be emphasised that when they are set to work for a period on the request service desk, they must be relieved during that time of all obligations to the counter. There are many such periods during the week when it is known that the counter will not be over-busy. The time has now come to recognise that the efficient handling of requests cannot be combined with the mechanical functioning of the counter.

Such variations in the staffing of the service will, of course, depend to a large extent on local conditions, and it is impossible to lay down rules as to precisely what assistants should carry out the duties. If it is appreciated that this is the focal point of the whole work of the library, then the question of staffing obviously becomes fundamental, and consequently requests will cease to be dealt with by *ad hoc* methods or to be left to the chance responsibility of whoever happens to be on the counter. It must always be borne in mind that the needs of the readers are paramount, because they are the only basic reason for the existence of the library.

When "display by personal guidance" is made the centre of all activities, a great deal more attention must be given to branch libraries. There, the need for skilled staff is if anything more urgent, because they have a smaller stock to use in the initial stages of a request, and depend more on bibliographical resources. It does not seem to have been generally considered that readers' assistants are so necessary at branches, probably because of the view that the "serious" reader will automatically go to the central library. In many cases no doubt he does, because he is all too aware of the standard of service to be expected at his local branch. This is the

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point at which many existing services fall down; good provision is made at the central library, but because of the failure to instal an adequate mechanism for inter-branch lending, all the skilled staff are concentrated at one point, once again passing the onus to the reader. Even in U.S.A., "very little has been done to make adequate reference service available through branches".¹

Yet with a good organisation, and with good staffing, there is no reason why branches should have to offer an inferior service. In one respect they are usually in a better position to give efficiency, since they do not maintain a separate reference department, and there is therefore no split between the two bibliographical services. The same staff can control all requests, of whatever sort, and thereby have the opportunity to become even more skilled in their true craft. And, what is very important, they can more easily establish a cordial relationship with their readers, based on community interests, since they do not deal with such a large number as the central staff.

The general set-up is unfortunately bad. Too often the branch staff consists of the librarian, burdened with administration, fuel returns, caretakers' time-sheets and so forth, plus a few junior or unqualified assistants. In many cases the entire staff is unqualified professionally. The situation with regard to reference tools is even worse, and often there is no provision whatever of bibliographies, in spite of a greater need for them at branches. These faults are probably due to failure to regard the system as a whole, resulting in lack of

¹ Howard, Paul, The reference function in the small and medium-sized public library. In Butler, Pierce, editor. *The reference function of the library*, University of Chicago, 1943.

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organisation for inter-branch lending, and concentration of advanced service at the central library. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that branches sometimes degenerate into mere issue points for fiction, with a totally inadequate non-fiction stock. Keen librarians are bound to fail to do justice either to the readers or to themselves, and inevitably gravitate to central or to other systems, because the stock is not built up so that it can cope with requests. Some authorities allow direct borrowing from the regional bureau by branches, a bad thing because it does not put all such requests through a single channel, and results in duplication of effort. It has been known for a library to be asked to lend a book to one branch of another system which is already on loan to another branch of that same system.

The service must be considered as a single unit, having at its call the entire stock of the system, and indeed of the whole country. At every point of contact with the public, there should be expert staff with the qualities necessary to encourage requests, backed up by provision of the right bibliographical tools, and able to view the stock as a whole either through a union catalogue or through a union shelf list. At branches, it is possible that, with a limited number of borrowers, the requests received do not occupy the whole time of the service staff. If this is so, there is no reason why they should not carry out other duties which can be done at the enquiry desk, and which do not carry such a responsibility that interruptions are unwelcome. Filing of catalogue cards, or accessioning fiction, for example, do not give the assistant the appearance of being too busy to attend to readers, nor do these tasks hold so much interest that they occupy the assistant's mind to the extent that he cannot concentrate on a

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request. At central libraries, of course, this type of task is usually done in a separate department altogether.

Viewing the service as a whole will result in a correct integration of the stationery used and of the organisation behind it. This makes it possible to devise forms which cater for all the courses of action that may become necessary at one stage or another. It is desirable, too, that each assistant should be fully aware of the actions carried out at other service points to deal with requests at each stage. Interchange of staff is therefore to be recommended; branch assistants should be sent on "courses" at central, so that they understand what happens when they transfer an enquiry from their branch to central. Similarly, central assistants should be given the opportunity to see how the branches work, and in this way various small points can be straightened out, and useful modifications of practice introduced, to avoid duplication of effort and ensure that each side gives and receives the most helpful information. A visit to the regional centre and, if possible, to the National Central Library, will show how these organisations work far better than any amount of reading in textbooks, and will certainly impress on the mind of the assistant the difficulties under which this work is carried on, sometimes because of mistakes made in the applications sent in.

To be able to give a high level of service, then, demands a very high degree of skill in the staff, and a sound organisation at their command. It is obviously of little use to provide qualified assistants if there is no way of carrying a request over a period of time other than relying on the memory or a haphazard recording method. This has led to serious objections being raised by those who do not yet operate such a service, that its cost precludes it

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from being established in any but the largest and wealthiest boroughs. The initial outlay is considerable, and other expenses inevitably occur in the form of better catalogues and more adequate provision of bibliographical tools. But the result is a great increase in the value of the library, as has been pointed out by the Chairman of a municipal libraries committee.²

Its profit is in reality immeasurable, though it may be partly invisible as far as the millstone of the profession, issue statistics, is concerned. It will show in the increased interest of the readers, and the greater respect that they will have for the library. It will not be long before they realise that, as L. R. McColvin has often said, a library service cannot be provided cheaply, and to try to do so, far from being an economy, is actually a waste of money. "Hardheaded business-men" are not in the habit of spending money on activities which do not prove their worth, yet the number of libraries in industry is increasing far more rapidly than the number of public libraries. A recent editorial in a leading scientific journal has stated: "Any worker in a scientific subject knows full well the absolute need for library services".³ There is an insistent demand, too, for the establishment in London of a scientific and technical library on the scale of the British Museum, in spite of the existence already of the libraries of the Science Museum and the Patent Office. It would be much more satisfactory if such provision could be decentralised through the agency of public libraries. Not only would the scientific workers, or workers in any field for that matter, be able to obtain their material

² Ranson, L. Functions and Control of a library in a small town, *Library Association Record*, Vol. 50, 1948, pp. 233-37.

³ *Chemistry and Industry*, No. 31, 5th August, 1950, p. 590.

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locally, but it would also offer another excellent chance to raise the status of the profession of librarianship.

It is impossible to do more than guess at the actual *additional* cost involved, since the existing charges depend to a large extent on the quality of the service already being given, but it seems likely that it would not exceed £400-£600 per annum according to the size of the system.* This is very much less than most librarians would cheerfully spend on a gramophone record collection, and not a great deal more than the cost of a news room, when all incidental expenses connected with that institution are taken into account. Furthermore, this figure is based on a well-established service dealing with over 15,000 requests in a year. When the service is just beginning, items such as staff time and postal charges would of course be smaller, and the inevitable increases can easily be justified by the value of the service to the town. Where it is absolutely necessary, other economies could be effected, for example by asking readers to call for their books instead of notifying them that they are available for collection. This cannot be recommended, however, as a general rule, since it will only lead to frequent disappointment for the public, and to wasting of the time of the staff by those who call two or three times a week. There are already enough of this category without encouraging the habit.

It is hoped that this will indicate how the social importance of the public library can be significantly developed without too heavy an addition to its cost. So far, there is no effective way of making a qualitative estimate of the value of the service; even to judge the

* Some approximate costs based on an existing service are given in the Appendix.

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number of requests by the cost of stationery and postage is quite inaccurate, since this takes no account of all the requests which are satisfied from the shelves, and these will amount to at least half of all that are received. This percentage, too, is likely to increase as the staff become more skilled in the use of the stock, especially if this is built up against the background of unsatisfied requests. It is possible to arrive at a figure by making a spot check of every request made over a given period, but here again it is very difficult to say that any one day or even week is representative, and to extend the check for longer than a week would impose an intolerable burden on the staff. Some indication is given by the number of books borrowed through the regional library service and the National Central Library, though this of course is open to the same objection as making a count of requests recorded. It should be pointed out, however, that where this figure is large, it does not mean that the library's stock is poor, as is so often thought, but that the service given is good. Only the very largest systems can ever hope to have a reasonable chance of satisfying most requests from their own stock, and if readers are encouraged to make known their needs, the variety of requests received will make it impossible for the average library to be sure of holding an adequate representation in every subject likely to be asked for. Libraries which do not restrict their subject matter or their readers are forced either to rely on co-operation or to demand an immensely greater book fund than they are ever likely to receive.

Nor is it really desirable that any system should attempt to be independent, when much better results can be derived from co-operation, and senior librarians in

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average-sized systems are not plagued with the many problems arising from the administration of a system on the colossal scale. It is obvious that a network of great regional reference libraries will have to come, but for the municipal lending library it is better to ensure that the regional library services and the N.C.L. are really well equipped to carry out their task without having to be continually grossly overworked. Given the right organisation and the determination to make the library a significant social force, there need be no fear that the appreciation of the public will be insufficient to safeguard the future.

CHAPTER VI

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SO FAR, the object of this study has been to define the place of the lending library as an integral part of the mechanism provided by a community to ensure that the knowledge requirements of any of its members can be met. In this way, the individual makes progress by increasing his knowledge, and through that increase he is given the power to become a more fully expressed personality and therefore a better citizen. Thus the circle is completed and the library established by corporate action of the community returns benefits to the community through its individual members.

Now if a lending service is to be provided which will fulfil all these conditions, by encouraging the subject approach, by allocating to these duties staff who are competent to handle subject requests, and by giving the staff the tools necessary, it is clear that a new study of method is also needed, so that the mechanical functioning of the organisation ceases to be a purely *ad hoc* matter. Not only will the number of requests accepted increase steadily, but their nature will change to a certain extent so that much more recording becomes necessary. It has constantly been suggested that the efficiency of the staff depends on the adequacy of the organisation provided to back them up, and that if they have to give any thought to the recording of progress, part of the concentration

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which should be spent on the request is lost, and time is wasted. In the study of method, therefore, the object will be to ensure that, as far as is possible, all progress records can be made automatically and without thought.

It is one of the features of this stage of our civilisation that mechanisation is rapidly being applied to many types of clerical work which it was formerly thought could only be done individually in each case. "Forms" are frequently the butt of music-hall wit, however, and there is still a considerable resistance to their extended use, particularly in the so-called "cultural" sphere, where man's mind is presumably uncontaminated by such materialist trifles. This arises, of course, from a complete misunderstanding of the power of forms if correctly designed. Like any other tool, they should be shaped for the job in hand, and can greatly simplify routine processes so that an immense increase is possible in the intellectual capacity of the service.

In any "long-range" reference work, that is, work on requests that are not satisfied immediately, some organisation is a necessity. This is particularly true of public libraries, where delays do frequently occur, either because the book wanted is on loan or because it is not in stock at all. It would be impossible, in a well-developed service, to rely on haphazard methods of recording, since this would impose a great strain on the minds of the staff in requiring a constant check on the *mechanism* of the service. The whole object of forms is to mechanise as far as possible, freeing the mind of the assistant from routine processes so that it can concentrate wholly on the actual request.

The stationery that is at present in vogue shows many faults, due partly to lack of a detailed analysis of its

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purpose and partly to a misplaced desire to simplify, as in cataloguing and classifying. The purpose of this stationery is to make the service independent of any individual, and to ensure continuity in spite of the human element. In the past, it would appear that the various aspects have developed independently of each other, so that there are in many places a number of different forms in use for what is fundamentally the same thing, the provision of reading material which is not immediately available. It must be reiterated that it is a matter of utter indifference to the reader whether his book is already in stock but on loan, about to be added, or whether it will be borrowed through the regional bureau. The same form, therefore, should be made to serve all these purposes, especially as they are all to be centred on the enquiry desk. It should be designed to cover every eventuality and so save the time of the staff by eliminating duplication of effort. The application of time and motion study is sadly lacking in libraries, but some attempt should at least be made to reduce the amount of writing—for instance, the number of times it is necessary to write out an author and title or a reader's name and address.

It is significant that, in the case of the Science Library, the form of record has to be made out in triplicate. In other words, where the service endeavours to be comprehensive and more than one source of material is involved, the first record is bound to appear complicated if subsequent duplication is to be avoided. It is not yet fully appreciated in the profession that one of the greatest of time-wasters for the staff is the passion for apparently simple devices which involve needless repetition of labour in their operation. To establish a trouble-free routine

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which overlooks nothing, all possible complications must be foreseen and catered for at the start, once for all. By doing this, not only are the search processes and loans details all clearly defined for the assistant, but the stationery assumes a pseudo-character of its own, and insists on the appropriate action being taken when it becomes necessary.

The importance of an adequate organisation can be emphasised by studying its effect on the staff, one of its most powerful results. It cannot be denied that a request loses some of its urgency with the passage of time if it cannot be solved at once, and it is fatally easy for it to be lost altogether. This is particularly true when it is committed to memory or recorded in a book, as is often the rule. Investigations among the users of public libraries show all too often that they have "heard nothing more" after making a request. Even with trained and conscientious staff, it is impossible to maintain the proper degree of urgency of every request by such simplified methods. It is not in the power of the human mind. The reasons are psychological and associated with the degree to which the request imposes itself on the consciousness of the assistant. Obviously, when left to the memory, it is a matter of chance whether or not it is finally solved, since no memory is perfect. But it is easy to assume that a request written in a book, or noted on a scrap of paper, will receive its proper attention simply because it should.

The scrap of paper method has its obvious faults, such as being mislaid, filed with other papers, accidentally dropped into the waste-paper basket. These, though true, are not faults intrinsic to scraps of paper considered as requests, since such calamities may conceivably befall

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other forms of record—even printed stationery. And since they are not confined to scraps of paper, it would be unjust to adduce them as arguments against this method. What damns it is that a scrap of paper has no intrinsic value; it is a thing of nought, and a request written on it rapidly assumes the same character, even to the person taking the request. It may be very well to use shirtcuffs or the backs of old envelopes to make notes *for oneself*, because these are usually acted upon or transferred to another record within a short time. It will not do when the request is from someone else and has no association with one's own desire for knowledge.

This lack of value leads to a second fault of scraps of paper, scarcely less important than the first in this context. They cannot be transferred easily from one person to another. In those frequent instances when such a record passes from one assistant to another, an explanation will always be necessary, and the impact on the consciousness of the receiver will be considerably lessened by the insignificant character of the record. It does not immediately identify itself as a request; it may equally well be a telephone message or an alteration to the time sheet. Scraps of paper must be ruled out on these two counts: they have no significant identity, and they cannot be mechanised.

It might seem at first sight that the book method suffers from neither of these faults, and many librarians maintain that such a record is sufficient. It can certainly be mechanised; if the book is correctly printed and ruled, there should be no need for verbal explanations on transfer. It also has significance, if used for requests only; though if it is a general Day Book, and especially if it circulates among a dozen people who all use it for their

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notes, its significance for requests is naturally greatly diminished. But assuming it to be kept for the one purpose, it will be entered daily, and solutions recorded in one of several ways. The entry may be ticked or crossed out; the answer may be written in a special column; or a combination of these may be used. In any case it will not be easy to pick out those which are still unsolved, at a later date. Even when the entries are scored out, a single unsolved entry in a page is not readily visible, and may be passed over in a rapid check. One defect, therefore, is that each request has not a definite identity of its own, and cannot easily be distinguished from the others.

Furthermore, and this is most important, once the page is turned over, previous unsolved requests are immediately put out of sight, and unless they are all brought forward to the current page—a frightful waste of time—their urgency suffers a disastrous blow. Thenceforward, it becomes a matter of chance whether they are ever looked at again, a chance decreasing as they recede into the past. The danger of this occurring is particularly great if completed pages intervene between the request and the current page, since an assistant referring back may easily be tempted to stop at the first page on which there are none left awaiting solution, assuming that everything previous has been cleared. The drawback to a book, therefore, is that requests do not readily reveal themselves, either as to their identity or as to the stage to which they have been taken. Once again, the impact on the assistant's consciousness is small, and may not have the effect of producing the right action.

As far as mechanisation is concerned, then, the book is only a partial success, and it throws so much on to the

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initiative of the staff that it cannot be held to be satisfactory. If an organisation requires a conscious effort from the staff to function correctly, it is not likely to be of great assistance in a project of this nature, in which the mind should be entirely free for bibliographical work without constantly having to divert its attention to ensuring that the mechanics of the system are in order. In addition, as with the scrap of paper method, another form is required for reader notification.

Both of these methods are now falling into disuse and being replaced by a specially printed form of one kind or another. When designing this stationery, an analysis should first of all be made of the tasks which it will be called upon to perform, which will naturally vary somewhat with different libraries. Owing to the persistence of the author approach, it has sometimes been thought sufficient to give the reader a card, on one side of which he fills in details of the book he wants, on the other his name and address. This at once assumes that either no subject requests are received, or if they are all bibliographical research will be completed before the card is filled in. (See Fig. 1).

| REQUEST CARD | |
|---|----------------|
| Author | Title |
| Edition required | Class No. |
| If the book required is not in the library catalogue, complete the following details as fully as possible. | |
| Publisher | Price |
| Reviewed | |
| The above book is now available and will be reserved at the Central Library until closing time on | |
| PLEASE BRING THIS CARD WITH YOU WHEN YOU CALL. <i>Borough Librarian.</i> | |

Fig. 1.

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The type of record of which this is one variation has many limitations. It means that, if the system is treated as a whole for purposes of stock, a second record must be made if the request is transferred to another service point, as from a branch to the central library. Another record is also necessary if a "cleared" file is kept after the card is sent to the reader. This means that the author and title, and very often the reader's name and address, must all be written out more than once, so that skilled staff are spending a significant amount of their time copying out details, even if important details, from one form to another.

Some of these objections are answered by a slightly improved specimen (Fig. 2). This recognises that a record is desirable after the reader has been notified, and accordingly draws up a form in two parts, one of which is detached to send as a notification. But once again, no provision is made for a subject request; the author and title have to be written out twice at least; and another record is necessary should the request require to be transferred to another service point. But a much more damaging objection applies to both of these examples, and arises out of their failure to acknowledge the subject approach. No space is given to the staff as a progress sheet, on which they can indicate how far the request has been taken in either library or bibliographical search, and the various sources of each kind have to be thought out anew for every request that offers any difficulty.

The layout of the record is of vital importance, and in order to eliminate time-wasting operations like name-copying, the basis for analysis of detail should be the *most difficult* request. If this is adequately catered for, all simpler requests will be so automatically.

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THE PUBLIC LIBRARY

REQUEST FORM Serial No.

Author's Name

Title

Publisher Price Date.....

If this book has to be obtained from another library,
will you agree to contribute to the cost of postage?

Reader's name

Address

Telephone No.

To be completed by Staff.

Class No. In stock at C N

S E

W....

THE PUBLIC LIBRARY

Date

Author

Title

The above book is now available and will be reserved
at the Library untilPlease bring this card and a ticket
or returned book with you.*Borough Librarian.*

Fig. 2.

The reverse of this form contains at the top a few details regarding source of the book; reserved, ordered or borrowed, or not available. The lower part, of course, takes the reader's name and address and forms his notice.

complicated form is the subject request taken at a branch, which cannot be satisfied from the entire stock of the system. The routines involved in this should be set out so that, as they are completed, they can be ticked and thus will not be repeated. The library search includes

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all those places such as shelves, oversize, binding, catalogues, where parts of the stock may be kept or recorded.

For this type of subject request not satisfied from stock, a bibliographical search is generally necessary. There are numerous general sources of reference which have frequently been described in the literature, and many more specialised ones which have not been so well treated. A list should be made of the more comprehensive sources, partly so that their existence is not overlooked by those unfamiliar with them, and partly, which is perhaps more important, so that the assistant does not have to waste his thought in recalling them to mind. Some of these tools may be available at the branch; if so, reference should of course be made to them there, and need not be repeated at central except in the case of an alternative edition.

Setting out the possibilities step by step, then, will give an exact account of all the details that the stationery should cover. First of all, a space should be provided for a filing mark to mechanise the arrangement of each sequence. Then, known information may be recorded under author, title or subject, and since the last of these may need some explanation, two or three lines should be left for that heading. If the book is to be bought or borrowed, publisher and any particular edition are required, with date of publication. Accession and class numbers of books in stock are needed by the staff for library searches, and a space should always be given to enable the urgency of the request to be shown. As it will often be necessary to transfer a request from one service point to another, some form of routing device must be included.

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It has been emphasised that one of the main objects of the service is to make skilled assistance available to readers at branches. From this and the integration of the service throughout the entire system, it will be clear that one record is not enough, and that to deal satisfactorily with transferred requests, three are necessary. One is to be kept on file at the place where the request is originally made, and can subsequently be used to notify the reader when the book is available. The second acts as a messenger between branches, stating what action is being taken at the central library, while the third is retained at central awaiting the arrival of the book, with which it is returned to the branch.

The middle copy, being the "action" copy for the library's own system, has listed on it all the places where a search has to be made. These may vary considerably from one library to another, but the important point is to list them all so that not only is no source overlooked, but it will suffice to tick each source to indicate clearly what has been done. Most of these various sequences will be held at branches also and a space should be provided for each service point. As this is the messenger which states what action has been taken by the central library, it also needs to list all possibilities of "buy", "borrow", "reserve", and "other".

The third form comes into use when the library's immediate resources have failed, and is, as it were, the "extra-mural" form. It carries details of bibliographical searches, and can also be used to show details of loans through the regional centre. As has been said, all major reference sources should be listed, but unlike the library search panel, this list cannot attempt to be exhaustive. A thorough knowledge of reference tools is only acquired

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with experience, and clearly the wider the assistant's acquaintance, the more efficient will be the service. An attempt can be made, however, to remind the staff of all the general sources.

It is only with such a highly organised method that freedom from care of the mechanism can be realised, and a further step taken by actually stimulating the mind to effort. The urgency of the request can never fade away, since at every stage of its career it demands the right action. It can be seen at a glance, by any assistant, whether there are any new requests calling for attention; any that have been put up for decision immediately make themselves obvious; a glance at the "Bureau" file shows at once if any are waiting for their applications to be made. The mechanisation is advanced another stage by the use of a diary, which enables a request to bring itself to notice at regular intervals until it is cleared. It is not an exaggeration to say that requests take on a "personality" of their own, representing the human reader, so that not only do they call for attention at appropriate times, but their impact on the consciousness of the assistant is of considerable force. And as has been pointed out already, a mind freed from the responsibility of maintaining the mechanism can devote its full power to the task of finding the most satisfactory solution.

It is by no means suggested that the forms now to be described represent anything more than a first attempt to fulfil all these conditions, begun in the Ilford Municipal Libraries early in 1948. With continued use and study, it is naturally to be expected that improvements will readily suggest themselves so that the details may be re-arranged to cut out or simplify some of the routine. This stationery resulted from dissatisfaction with that

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previously in use coupled with the wish to integrate a number of different services each using its own separate form.

The front of each of the three pages is the same, and contains details of author, title, subject; name, address and telephone number of the reader; and any other remarks which the assistant taking the request may consider necessary.

| | | | |
|------------------------------|--|---------------|------|
| Reference (for filing) | 19.. | 1 .. | 2 .. |
| | | 3 .. | 4 .. |
| Author | Reader's name, add- ress and telephone number. | | |
| Title | | | |
| | | | |
| Publisher..... | Price.. | Date & ed.... | |
| Class No. | Accession No. | | |
| Obtain from RLS..... | Wanted by..... | | |
| Remarks/Subject | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | Advised .. | | |

Form A.

It would clearly be impossible to get all this detail on a five-inch by three-inch card, as had been used before; the dimensions were therefore made eight by five inches, this being also a standard size, and being easily foldable to fit a small window envelope. The panel at the right hand side is used for the reader's name and address, which is written transversely across the form. When the book is available, Form A is completed where necessary,

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folded to show the address in a window envelope, and posted to the reader. Thus one extra record is eliminated, and these details only have to be written once. The space "Obtain from RLS" is filled in at the time of taking the request, and if there is any postage to be paid by the reader, this should be made clear. A point to remember is that, if a periodical article is required, it may arrive as part of a bound volume, in which case the postal charge might be more than for a book.

The reverse of the top copy, then, is the letter of notification to the reader that the book is ready.

ILFORD MUNICIPAL LIBRARIES REFERENCE SERVICE

..... Library
..... (Date)

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am pleased to inform you that the book named overleaf is now available at this library, where it is being held for you until closing time on

* The book has been obtained through the Regional Library Service and is due for return on Application for its renewal should be made two or three days before.

Postal charges amount to

Yours faithfully,

* Delete if not applicable. *Borough Librarian.*
PLEASE BE SURE TO BRING THIS NOTICE WHEN YOU CALL.

Form B.

It will be realised that, as this is the notification, it must be kept tidy. Hence it remains as the file copy until the book is ready, and the details of library and bibliographical search are removed to the reverse sides of the second and third copies. This ensures that a complete

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file is always maintained at the place where the request was received. Where no postal charges are made, of course, this wording can be omitted. A space is left at the top right hand corner so that each branch can insert its own address. There should be no difficulty in persuading readers to bring the notice with them, but if the "cleared" file is kept in classified order, it will be a simple matter to turn up the request in the few cases where readers do fail to bring the notice.

The reverse of the second copy is used for the library search, and space must be provided for the branches as well as the central library.

| LIBRARY SEARCH | | | | | |
|---------------------|-------------------------|---|---|---|-------|
| | | C | S | N | E W |
| Class No. | Union Cat. | | | | |
| Accession No. | Lending Cat. | | | | |
| | Ref. Lib. Cat. | | | | |
| | Shelves | | | | |
| Action taken:— | Oversize | | | | |
| Due back..... | Reserve Stock | | | | |
| Purchase | Temporary res. stock | | | | |
| Obtain from RLS.... | Issue | | | | |
| Other | Binding | | | | |
| | Replacements | | | | |
| | Withdrawals | | | | |
| | Queries | | | | |

Form C.

If a request cannot be satisfied at the branch, the second and third copies are referred to central, and when action has been taken there, details are entered on Form C, including decision on source of supply. This form is then returned to the branch to be filed with the top copy.

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awaiting the arrival of the book. Since the two forms are henceforth together, there is no need to write any sort of progress report on Form A. The library search panel should be ticked as each source is investigated, to show to what stage the search has been taken and to eliminate explanations if transfer to another assistant becomes necessary.

Several duties are performed by the third copy, which is printed on thin card as it is the permanently-filed "cleared" copy. The left hand panel contains details of

| | |
|--|--|
| Class No. | Bibliographical Search |
| Accession No. | Ref. Cat. 1924..1928..1932.. 1936..1938..1940.. |
| Action taken:— | CBL (dates) |
| Due back.... Other.... | CBI (dates) |
| Purchase | Eng. Cats..... |
| Bureau:— | U.S. Cats..... |
| Applied.... Postage.... | Pub. Circ. Lewis.... |
| Waiting list.. Received.. | Bookseller..... Aslib.... |
| Renewals.. Unobt'nable. | Enc. Brit..... Lond. Lib... |
| Overdues | TLS..... NBL lists.... |
| Lending library | Sonnenschein ... BNB.... |
| F Received the book named overleaf | Subj. Ind. Periodicals |
| | Other bibliographies..... |
| (Reader's signature) | Other periodicals |
| | Other Sources..... |

Form D.

application to the Regional Bureau, and a space for the reader to sign when collecting the book. This impresses upon him that it has been borrowed from a special source and should therefore be given more than usual care. The bibliographical search is ticked off in the same way as

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the library search, except that there is no need to explore a source more than once, except where different editions are involved, and dates should be entered where applicable. Central staff can thus see at a glance what has been done at the branch in cases of transfers. When the work required is not available at the central library, and is being bought or borrowed, Form C of branch requests is returned to the branch with "Action taken" details completed, and Form D is retained to await the arrival of the book, with which it is sent.

For central library requests, both second and third copies are filed with the top copy as soon as the appropriate action has been taken and the relevant details completed. If the book is in stock but out on loan, C is passed to the counter with a "reserve" signal attached to it, to be looked for by junior staff in the places listed. When located, the date due is filled in and the form returned to the desk for filing with the top copy behind a guide card "Awaiting book". The signal is inserted in the charge in the usual way so that the book is automatically passed to the desk on its return.

One of the main drawbacks to any form of multiple stationery is the necessity for juggling with carbon paper, and it is along these lines that improvements have been sought so far. Pre-carboning, as is done with many government forms, is very much more expensive and has been rejected for the time being at least. A somewhat modified form has been introduced in the Acton Public Libraries which avoids the need for changing carbon papers by making use of one-time carbons attached at the top edge and thrown away after use. This stationery is more expensive initially, but makes up for this extra cost by the saving in staff time and temper. It has

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involved some re-arrangement of the text, however, to bring all the details from the back to the front of the middle copy, and this has not yet been carried out to complete satisfaction. Another economy is made by leaving blank the front of the third copy, to reduce printing costs. When the form is filled in, the meaning of all the details is quite clear to the staff.

The methods of filing should be arranged to give the maximum information at any stage. It has been found that a classified order throughout is best, with the one exception of the file of cards for books awaited via the regional centre. This enables a quick reference to be made while the request is in the "awaiting book" stage, and also allows a collection of data to be made over a period of time to illustrate the use of the service in relation to the various subject groups. The "Reference" at the head of Form A should therefore be the class mark of the subject of the request. It is not vital that this should be the same as that given to the actual book; in the case of an author/title request, for example, it may prove difficult to allot the correct number at once, without seeing the book. The answer to a subject request may be found in a work dealing mainly with another subject, having therefore a different class number.

This is not such a disadvantage as it might appear. For reserves, the right number can be added when the book is checked in the Union Catalogue, and thus the signal will carry both numbers for reference to the issue and the desk file. Where books are borrowed from another library, the chances of the same number are small, even where the same classification scheme is in use, which is not always the case. The reason for keeping this file in alphabetical order, though, is that no record

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showing the original reference will be with the book when it arrives. When the book is to be purchased, the reference is put on the card passed to the Order Department which is returned to the desk with the book. In all other cases, one of the forms, carrying the original reference, will be with the book wherever it goes.

These two extra records, regional bureau application and order card, are normally found. Bureau applications are made on a special form supplied by the centre, and should always be typed, with full details wherever possible. The card sent to the order department remains with them until the book is prepared for circulation, and should be of a distinctive colour, so that the request is treated as urgent for cataloguing and classifying and so arrives at the desk as quickly as possible.

Files to be kept are:—

Central Library.

- (1) New requests (before any action is taken).
- (2) For decision on source of supply (if not in stock).
- (3) Awaiting book (when reserved or to be bought).
- (4) Applied to Regional Bureau (alphabetical).
- (5) Cleared.

Branches.

- (1) New requests.
- (2) Awaiting book (when reserved or transferred to Central).
- (3) Cleared.

An additional precautionary routine should be adopted for books borrowed through the regional bureau. After the reader has signed the third copy, this should be filed at the central library in a separate file in chronological order of the date due back. This acts as a loans

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file of such books, and from it overdue notices can be written when necessary, and applications to the lending library for renewal. It is very important that all routine involving the stock of other libraries should be given particularly careful attention, and it is in matters like these that the library preserves the goodwill of those with whom it is co-operating.

To ensure that a request is not overlooked in the "awaiting book" file, since reserve signals may accidentally become detached from a loans charge, or there may be difficulty in locating a copy of the work required, there are two methods of periodically reviewing requests on which action has been taken. One is to look through the file of forms one by one, noting dates due for reserves and similar details relating to the book's whereabouts, and making a check on these where it seems advisable. As there may be several hundred cards in the file, this is obviously a task of considerable magnitude, and in all likelihood not to be attempted more than once in six months or even longer. The other method, much more effective and automatic, is to keep a diary which will bring forward each request after a period of time. This is conveniently a month, but there will naturally be occasions when the urgency is greater. Requests taken the previous day are entered in the morning, under the day one month ahead; they are first sorted into class order, and the reference and date entered in the diary. This is all that is necessary; where there are more than one request having the same class number for the same day, they can be numbered consecutively. If they are reserves for a work of great popularity, the time of making the request can be added to the reference number.

The diary is also consulted each morning to see what

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requests have been brought forward to that day, in case any "hasteners" are wanted. If the request is cleared already, the entry is cancelled, the request declares itself as satisfied by its absence. If not, investigation is made, and where the delay is normal—for instance where there is a waiting list for the book—an entry is made for a further month ahead. In this way, an automatic register is provided to ensure that a request is never lost sight of, since it regularly comes under scrutiny until it is cleared. This involves some extra work, but it is more than set off by the gain in reliability. In fact, some review of this sort is essential if the service is to function satisfactorily.

The mechanical accessories which facilitate handling are two. First, the window envelopes in which the forms are sent to readers; the cost of these is made up in the saving of staff time which would be required to write the name and address on the back of a postcard. Second, a very valuable addition consists of a form of envelope, with no flap and open along the top and right hand edge. The front is cut away at the top to a depth of half an inch. These are used for keeping the file copy in, while awaiting the book, and any correspondence or inter-branch notes can then conveniently be housed along with the original form A, and the new information does not need to be recorded on it. The cutaway section at the top allows the filing mark to be visible. When cleared, the contents are removed and the envelope used again. Apart from its value as a receptacle, this also performs the very useful function of keeping the notification clean, the importance of which has already been emphasised.

There seems to be fairly general agreement on the advantages of maintaining the file of "out-of-the-way" information on the desk, and an extension of this, from

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the organisational point of view, is to route all new non-fiction to the desk before it goes into circulation, so that it can be analysed from the staff's knowledge of the type of subject that is asked for, and an entry made for any noteworthy material that has not been given an analytical entry in the catalogue. This also ensures that the staff become familiar with the latest additions to stock. and they will carry out their duties very much more efficiently if they are allowed this time to browse through new books. This index is of course best kept on cards in a classified order—it is useless in a dictionary order—and by using it as a supplement (not an alternative) to the main catalogues, the resources of the stock can be exploited to the full.

A subject index of readers' interests should also be kept, as an elaboration of the classified cleared file which will contain one card for every request. In the index of readers, one card can be used for each subject, entering a number of names on it to give a quicker reference to those interested. This will also give a guide to the permanence of their interest, and it is advisable to enquire of the reader, before entering his name, if he would like to receive automatic notifications of additions in his subject. It must always be remembered that reference service, at its highest level, consists not only of speedy and efficient supply, but also of the anticipation of readers' needs, so becoming a really significant factor in the life of the community. It is in matters like this that a new approach is needed in the profession, because it is certainly not yet fully realised how much this form of service is appreciated by the public. It is expected of a special library; it should be the aim to make it expected of the public library also.

CHAPTER VII

PROCEDURE

THE PROCEDURE for the actual receiving and handling of requests has several times been outlined in textbooks on reference service and assistance to readers.¹ It has, however, usually been done in a somewhat vague and tentative manner, on the grounds that one should rely on flair rather than be restricted to a definite routine. This is actually to demand the freedom of anarchy, when the mind is enslaved by the ever-recurring necessity of having to decide what to do next. In addition, these outlines have been usually derived from the viewpoint of the reference library, and do not strictly apply to the lending department, since the reader will hardly wish, or be allowed, to take home a volume of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* to study, and therefore the use of such "short-range" material will not be so great.

What is required is to develop a technique, not of interviewing the reader or compiling a dossier about his personal background (which he may well resent), but of carrying out a search in the most efficient manner, based on the degree of accessibility of the various groups of sources. The maximum search should be made while the

¹ For example, in J. D. Cowley, *Use of reference material*, 1937; McColvin, L. R. and E. R., *Library stock and assistance to readers*, 1936; Hutchins, M., *Introduction to reference work*, 1944.

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reader is present, and his opinion sought; he should be able to feel that the effort is a co-operative one, and that his opinion is of more value than that of the assistant, as indeed it is. Rationalisation of the record should be accompanied by rationalisation of the method of handling the request, and the following sequence has been found to be the quickest way of arriving at a book which will give the answer to a subject request.

1. Classify the request. This is best done by reference to the schedules of the scheme in use, so that alternatives can be noted as well as the nearest main heading.
2. Consult the "out-of-the-way" index, to see if similar enquiries have revealed chapters or sections of works classed elsewhere.
3. Consult the shelves at the headings noted. In this way, if a book is in, the reader gets it at once, without requiring to consult the catalogue.
4. Consult any general works at other headings which may suggest themselves.
5. Consult the catalogue to see what is in stock, with a view to reserving a book. It should not be necessary to return to the shelves, since any satisfactory book should have been found at step 3 if it had been "in". With an adequately annotated catalogue, the reader should be able to select a title if there is anything on the subject in stock.

If the request is taken at a branch, and the union catalogue shows that a book is in central stock, it is best to use the telephone to find out if it is available; it often is, which saves time and stationery and also impresses the reader.

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6. Check bibliographies or periodical indexes to see what has been published. Select a title to offer the reader, and this may then either be borrowed or purchased to fill a gap in the stock.
7. Consult, again by telephone if possible, any other organisations that may be able to help. The various D.S.I.R. stations and Research Associations are usually willing to help public libraries, and most of their material is not considered confidential. The contacts made in this way will soon give the staff a fairly accurate idea of the scope of such bodies. Most publishers and journal editors will readily give information about their own publications, or give a lead to another source. There are already several directories such as Aslib *Guides* and *Industrial Research*, but where a new source is discovered, it can usefully be entered in the "out-of-the-way" index. The telephone directories will often give a likely source under a catchword.

It will be realised that this order is designed to avoid repetition by exhausting the possibilities at each stage, so that once a step is taken, it should not be necessary to return to it. It ensures that a complete review of the library's own stock is made before a request is passed on to the Bureau, and as L. R. McColvin has pointed out, "the volume of inter-library lending could be considerably reduced—and borrowers be better pleased—if an intelligent assistant spent a few minutes each time discovering exactly what was wanted and how far his own stock could help".² This routine has been devised for subject enquiries, and a part of it will not be required

² *Library Review*, No. 89, Spring 1949, p. 10.

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when the request is for a specific book. Even so, it can prove useful as a means of selecting alternatives if these are possible, and will demonstrate the library's ability to produce for the reader what is equivalent to a short bibliography of his subject, however specialised it may be.

When all the necessary details have been completed to identify a given book, that is to say when the bibliographical work of translating a subject request into an author/title has been done, the second copy of the form is passed to the counter for reservation if in stock; if not, the third is sent to the librarian for decision on source of supply. Once again, the form is designed to be self-explanatory, each section indicating clearly what action it expects to receive.

Now that the technical and mechanical processes have been reviewed, it may be helpful to summarise what actually happens when a request is received.

Routine common to central and branches.

Find out what the reader really wants. This is not necessarily what he asks for, but a little practice will soon enable the assistant to make an accurate estimate of the real need.

If the book is not available, or a subject request cannot be satisfied from the shelves, fill up as much of form A as possible; add the filing number at the top, and file the top copy in "New requests".

If the book is in stock, pass the second copy to the counter for reservation. File the third with the top copy. When traced, enter the date due on the second copy and file it with the others in the "Awaiting book" sequence.

Enter in the diary one month ahead.

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Branches only.

If not in stock, pass the second and third copies to the central library, and file the top copy "Awaiting book".

Central library only.

If not in stock, obtain complete details via the bibliographical search panel on form D. File the second copies of all requests with the top copies of central requests in "Awaiting book", and pass third copies to the Librarian for decision.

If the book is to be borrowed, pass third copies to the typist, who copies the details on to the Regional Bureau form and returns the original to the desk, where it is filed "Applied to Bureau".

If to be purchased, make out an order card and pass to the Order Department; file all three copies of central requests and third copies of branch requests, in "Awaiting book".

Fill in "action taken" on second copies of branch requests, and return to the branch for filing with their top copies.

When the book is received from the Bureau, fill in the details on form D. If a branch request, send book on with third copy.

Central and branches.

When a book is received to cover a request made at that place (that is, all except those received at central to cover branch requests), take out the forms in "Awaiting book", fill up form B and post it to the reader, leaving third copies in the book until collected.

Note the date cleared on the third copy and file away in class order, except for Bureau books, when

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third copies become the record of loan while the reader has the book.

Superficially, this may seem a complicated organisation which adds little to the present level of achievement in most libraries. But what it attempts to do is to make it possible for any lending library to take all action necessary to satisfy all the enquiries made by readers. It is not good enough simply to consult the catalogue and admit defeat if there is nothing there. Nor should it stop at the compilation of book lists, which after all, from the reader's point of view, is little more than copying titles from several lists on to one, and in any case does not give him the assistance he generally needs, namely in *selection*. Nor can this "all be done in the reference library", because attention is here directed to the class of book which requires study and not consultation. If the reference library obtains books for lending, then it is turning itself into a lending library. It has long been evident that there is a continual demand for the type of information best supplied by a non-loanable stock, and with that class of material this study is not concerned.

The object of this organisation is to increase the importance of the library through its lending department, so that an equally good service is given to those who wish to do their studying at home. In the great cities it may be most satisfactory to group all provision of reference service and study material round the reference department. In the average public library, however, the normal approach is through the lending department, and it is there that improvement in the quality of personal service is most needed.

CHAPTER VIII

CO-OPERATION

IT IS CLEAR that a service which sets out to attract requests of all types and in all subjects would require a book-stock far greater than the present average level if libraries were obliged to be completely independent units. Fortunately, the regional scheme has already proved its value, since no library in these days can hope to be anything like comprehensive in any except the most specialised fields. For many requests, therefore, it is necessary to have recourse to an outside library for supply. It should, however, be remembered that, although the numbers of requests received by regional centres would undoubtedly increase if the service became general, their proportion of the total of requests actually received by individual libraries would probably be less, since there would be more efficient use of the available stock before submitting the request to the bureau.

A new attitude to the regional scheme will have to be built up. An organisation without parallel in the world has been put into action by the co-operative efforts of British librarians, yet even now there are many who regard constant use of this great system as an indication of weakness! We boast of it in the international field, pointing to the millions of books that are available for our readers; on the home front, however, a library making good use of it is frequently told that its stock "must be inadequate". Fortunately this attitude is slowly waning,

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and although there are still many librarians who are unwilling to use the scheme, those who do use it, as a deliberate policy, are increasing in number, and there have, indeed, been open avowals of dependence in the professional press. In return for this extra use, the library should offer absolute accuracy in its application forms, a prompt service when asked to supply, and willingness to take over the work of subject requests, which it may be better equipped to carry out.

Perhaps the greatest value of all from the social point of view, is the work made possible by co-operation for branch libraries, or any small library for that matter. This has been one of the main problems of our time: to secure for the small unit the same degree of efficiency, and the same benefits for readers, as should occur in the large and wealthy systems. In the McColvin *Report*, it was concluded that many of the small units were so bad that it was impossible for them to retain their autonomy and give a good service. A new type of organisation was recommended, based on Regions rather than on local government areas as at present. It was described how it would be possible to provide trained staff and good stock at all points, with a background administration run by those trained, not as librarians, but in the type of work on which they were employed. There are obvious advantages in such a scheme, particularly the possibility of attracting good assistants by being able to offer better rates of pay and a wider view of the profession. This contrasts with the present situation, when it is by no means uncommon for chief librarians to be appointed by small authorities to one of the lower professional grades, to be burdened with all administrative details and tiny, unqualified staffs.

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The opposition that has been aroused from small systems, which was to be expected, has developed along different lines from those which might have been anticipated. It has not been put forward that it is a bad thing to deprive younger librarians of the chance of administrative autonomy, but that a small unit, backed up by the regional bureaux, can give a better personal service if it sets out with the intention to do so. The staff can make closer contact with readers, and can develop a greater awareness of their needs by mixing in local cultural and recreational activities. This gives them exactly the community of interest, and the knowledge of what lies behind the making of a request, that is the foundation of a good reference service, and is of course the basis of all special library work. If it be objected that few of the small systems have yet advanced so far, and that the majority are still much behind the leaders, it must be remembered that this is also true of not-so-small systems.

The new schemes of co-operative purchase, like that of the South-Eastern Region for example, have shown that a complete collection of books published in the United Kingdom, based on the *British National Bibliography*, can be made in each region at a very small cost to the individual libraries participating.¹ In this scheme, each library undertakes to buy all works classified under certain numbers that appear in the B.N.B. This means that they are to a certain extent freed from the responsibility of buying works in every field of knowledge, and can afford to spend more of their book fund against readers' requests. No doubt it can be objected that there are many works which all the public libraries should possess; but here

¹ Hill, W. J. L., *Library Association Record*, Vol. 52, 1950, p. 229.

again the librarian can use his own judgment with a clear conscience if he knows that, even if he does not buy, he will always be able to borrow from the subject library. If the demand proves too great, there is no reason why the subject library should not notify the centre that extra copies are required.

An organisation of this kind should actually relieve some of the strain on the regional centres. When staffs become accustomed to the idea that all subjects are covered somewhere in the region, a subject request should in many cases be capable of being satisfied by a telephone call to the right library, and therefore should not need to go through the centre. A good deal of purely administrative work could thus be avoided and the book brought to the reader in the shortest possible time. This would be even more likely if the scheme were to include special libraries, whose staffs usually possess considerable bibliographical knowledge of their field.

The provision of well-organised reference services in the small libraries will enable them to make great use of such a scheme. The time of the staff is used to the best advantage by the utmost possible mechanisation and discarding of out-of-date methods, and there need be no fear that the small system would then be obliged to surrender its autonomy for the sake of improved service. It must be acknowledged at the outset, of course, that such systems are bound to have to lean heavily on the scheme, and it should no longer be considered a stigma to do so. By the avoidance of a too great centralisation, the small library can keep its independence with even greater confidence, since the chief librarian will be freed from the task of matching the limited book fund to the entire field of knowledge, and will thus be able to foster particular

local interests. When co-operative purchasing is coupled with co-operative assistance to readers, the value of the library cannot fail to improve without sacrifice of local rights and freedoms.

Such co-operation brings with it the habit of regarding the stock of the entire region as a unit, and libraries are naturally prepared to lend without hesitation books on their special subject, knowing that the same service is available to them in other fields. The authority of a telephone call should be accepted, without waiting for forms. One of the present drawbacks is the delay in obtaining books from an outside source. It is bad in every way for one library to refuse to lend to another until it has received a requisition form, as has sometimes happened. This is due to imperfect understanding on the part of lending staffs of the importance of speedy satisfaction of requests. But if inter-dependence is admitted and supported, and request service points are always staffed by seniors, this should not arise, as all those handling requests in every library will be keenly aware of both the rights and the duties of a co-operative enterprise.

In addition to the benefits arising from mutually comprehensive stocks, it will be possible for individual libraries to set up a scientific basis for book selection based on the information derived from the file of "cleared" requests. The method can only be sketched at present, but it will be capable of great development since it is founded on the actual capacity of the library to satisfy its readers. Some use of the method already exists quite widely, but like the service itself, it has not yet been rationalised to the extent of becoming reliable in all cases. From this, it should not be thought that all

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chance of exercising his skill will be taken from the librarian. Co-operative purchases and deliberate buying against demand only occupy a moderate proportion of the book fund, but are important from the point of view of the reference service.

Firstly, a periodical analysis can be made of requests by classes, showing those which have been asked for in their degrees of frequency. Since this represents the way in which the right books are *not* found on the shelves—the correct procedure will ensure their discovery if they *are* there—a picture can be built up of the relative weakness or strength of each class, compared with the stock as a whole. This must, of course, be measured against any known statistics of readers' interests, gained from knowledge of local industries and societies, the index to readers' interests kept at the service desk, and any surveys which have been made. For example, if four times as many requests have to be recorded in photography as in architecture, it is obvious that the first is less capable of coping with the existing demand, and it should be strengthened accordingly. It may be objected that this could mean that the photographers were more alive to the use of the public library than the architects, or that the latter were obtaining their material elsewhere. This is not a valid argument, however, since there is no point in providing what is not required at the expense of what is. There are many ways of testing and arousing interest by displays, lectures and other extension work which has frequently been described in the literature. Once the quality of the service becomes known, too, there is no danger of its being overlooked by a whole class of readers who are genuinely unsatisfied.

This represents the first stage of analysis only, and is

certainly practised already up to a point. A deeper level can be reached by close classifying of requests, as each subject can then be broken down into its subdivisions in the same way, and an estimate formed of their relative adequacy. It is no use adding basic texts on the broad outlines of a subject if the library already has a good selection and the real demand is for detailed information on a specific aspect. These are obvious considerations, but they must be borne in mind when using these methods as scientific aids to book selection.

The next stage is represented by a comparison of requests satisfied from stock with those which have to be borrowed via the regional centre. If 80 per cent of requests become reserves, it is clear that the quality of the stock is reasonably satisfactory, but not the quantity, and some duplication is therefore needed, as advocated by L. R. McColvin in his "saturation" theory. The converse is also true; if a very large percentage comes via the Bureau, the quality and quantity are inadequate. Against this there should, of course, be estimated the justifiable degree of dependence on other libraries; it has already been stressed that no library can attempt to be completely self-sufficient.

Under present circumstances, it may well be that much of the Bureau percentage represents demands for certain standard works which are out of print. It is in cases like this that the contacts made by the staff prove useful in obtaining advance notice of re-publication, so ensuring that the library is not unlucky with a limited edition. And it is in these matters that public libraries could exert a much more dynamic influence than at present, in securing the re-issuing of such works by representations to the publisher. A valuable addition to co-operation

would be the notification of such advance information to the regional centre, who could circulate it to other members. This will not react against the library supplying the information if they have already placed their order. On the contrary, it will prevent victimisation in the form of continued borrowing by those who missed the work on its re-issue.

A case can be quoted of a library which possessed one of the very few copies in the region of a highly-prized work, constantly in demand by its own readers and by other libraries. When a new edition came out, three more copies were added to the stock, in the expectation that other libraries would also buy and so decrease the number of their requests. This was not so. The edition sold out immediately, but the publicity had enormously increased the demand, and as only a few more copies appeared in the region, the library had to reserve one copy almost permanently for applications from other systems. It is obvious that none should be penalised for being willing to buy in this manner against expressed demand. In fact, if such means were widely used, a large number of pre-publication orders might well induce publishers to bring out larger editions than originally planned, knowing that they will not lie in the warehouse.

At the level of the individual book, it is possible to gain a fairly exact idea of whether or not extra copies are required. There are many works, for example, which create a huge demand of an entirely temporary nature. How often have many extra copies been bought against such a demand, only to find them all together on the shelves after a year or two! The permanence of the demand can be fairly accurately assessed by plotting the number of requests received over a period of time,

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monthly total against months, when the resultant curve will show the continuity of demand. If it maintains a steady level with no falling off, a clear case exists for extra copies according to the volume of requests. On the other hand, there is no necessity to buy at all if the curve shows signs of falling with any sharpness, when copies in stock may be expected soon to reach a state of equilibrium with demand.²

To go to these lengths in deciding whether or not to buy more copies of a single work will only occasionally be necessary; in most cases the librarian will exercise his flair or judgment without assistance. But most book selectors will agree that there ought to be a reliable basis for decision in cases of doubt, and this method gives a fairly accurate forecast of the probable use that will be made of a book. The request service staff will naturally have a clear idea of the position also, and additions of this type can and should be discussed with them when the suggestion for additions is put forward.

² There is an interesting explanatory article on the use of logarithmic graphs for library statistics, by E. R. J. Hawkins, *Library Association Record*, Vol. 39, 1937, p. 257.

CHAPTER IX

PROBLEMS, AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

THERE ARE a number of problems still to be solved before the service can be regarded as satisfactory. One of the most pressing is the delay which too often occurs between the taking and clearing of a request. This is only partly the responsibility of the library, being partly concerned with the bookseller. Efforts are constantly being made to speed up the work of processing a new book, and those which have been purchased against requests should be given every priority through accessioning, cataloguing and preparation sections. It is for this reason that the cards sent from the desk to the order department must be of a distinctive colour, so that when the book is received from the bookseller, it at once declares itself to be urgent, and can be sent through without having to take its turn with the rest of the normal supply of new books. In some systems, the request service staff are able to telephone local booksellers when asked for a specific work that is not in stock, so that the reader is able to obtain it almost at once. While this is obviously a good thing, it is only an empirical remedy and does not go to the root of the trouble. Some research could be carried out to devise new ways of administering order departments, so that there is no wasting of time in the actual processes, and speeding-up becomes automatic, and not a matter of *ad hoc* action.

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Delays have occurred between library-bookseller-publisher, even where the staff have ascertained from the publisher that stocks of the work required are held, and at times the order has even been returned "unobtainable". Although this may be beyond the control of the library, it is at least up to the order department to try to minimise the chances of such occurrences. Suggestions noted for purchase will normally be accompanied by full bibliographical details, and should be dealt with separately from other orders. If a special list marked "Urgent" is compiled each day, and accessions cards filled up as far as possible at the time of placing the order, there will be fewer technical operations to perform on receipt. If the request is particularly urgent, there seem to be good reasons for clearing it before the book is processed; there are of course cogent reasons against this, and it must remain a matter for discretion. It must be remembered, however, that to break the rules in this way brings little extra work, will not result in the collapse of the whole system, and will certainly be of immense importance to the reader. Where possible, an arrangement should also be made with booksellers, so that they too will be ready to give priority to orders made out to cover requests.

It is much more difficult to devise ways of speeding the arrival of books which are reserved or are coming from another library. Books are not renewed if there is a reserve signal in the charge to show that another reader is waiting for a request, and it is customary to post notifications as soon as the books are returned. More use could perhaps be made of the telephone for notifications, but this takes time—much longer than slipping a form into a window envelope—and as it can save a day

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at most, it does not seem worth introducing as a routine. It is certainly necessary in the few cases where a day is vital.

Apart from giving immediate treatment to the processing of requests—not forgetting those asked for by the Regional bureau—there remain delays for which a solution is not easily discovered, but there is scope for closer relations with booksellers and publishers, who will without doubt be willing to adopt a preferential routine when they understand the purpose for which it is wanted. As far as unnecessary delays are concerned, that is those which arise through carelessness at some point, these should be guarded against through the use of the diary, which brings forward every request for investigation when it appears that clearing it is taking longer than it should.

Another question which has not received a great deal of study is the use of periodicals. As has been said, in special libraries these are often more important than books, and long runs are by no means infrequent. But this is reasonable for them since they are usually confined to a limited field. A general library covering the whole of knowledge might well shrink from attempting to keep sets of even the most important periodical in every subject. The result is generally a compromise, with local newspapers and perhaps *The Times* being kept, and others being discarded after a year or two. This again is reasonable, since by that time their knowledge has usually become either stabilised in books or superseded. But the choice of titles in the first place, and the length of time for which they are kept, has always been subject to *ad hoc* decision because there is no other means by which they can be determined.

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There is, however, one way in which an improvement could be made. Since the work of the reference service staff is largely bibliographical, much more use could be made of the abstracts journals. Public libraries are almost completely dissociated from abstracting services, and not until very recently has the profession realised their value sufficiently to establish its own *Library Science Abstracts*. Perhaps when these have been in circulation long enough to be fully appreciated, librarians will try to make more use of those in other fields. It would probably be better to cover all subjects by abstracts journals than to attempt to provide a representative title in each, where it is impossible to do both. Many of these journals contain informative and not merely indicative abstracts, and are sometimes found sufficient in themselves. A great deal of attention is currently being given to the improvement of abstracting services, particularly in scientific fields, and if librarians in general libraries were informed, through their reference staff, of how they could be used to help the general public, there is no doubt that some very useful suggestions could be put forward. But at present, it seems rather that even the value of the cumulated *British National Bibliography* is ignored; although it is widely used for book selection, few librarians appear to have seen its potentialities as a tool for bibliographic research in satisfying subject requests. Yet the lack of precisely such a tool has greatly increased the difficulties of the reference task, and one cannot but suspect that those who deny its value, like those who advocate simplified cataloguing and three-figure classifying, do not fully appreciate the nature of the service.

A great step forward could also be taken by closer relations with local special libraries. There is too much

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duplication at present; each side tends to ignore the other, and while co-operation between them may be entirely cordial, neither is very willing to admit that the other can be of much assistance in an organised manner. The Sheffield periodical scheme has been the subject of much praise and equal criticism, but it does point a way in which such co-operation may be increased to mutual advantage. No doubt the brunt of this work will be borne by the public library, though it should be remembered that in Sheffield, almost a one-industry town, many of the occupational studies will be based on special libraries, and therefore the public library may not find so great a need to call on the other participants for specialised information. This is unlikely to be so in most towns, where the public library could undoubtedly gain much from judicious use of special sources.

It would be necessary to define clearly the "spheres of operations" of each side, and the best way to do this would be to set up a local committee of representatives of all the libraries in the area. As with the regional system, much can be done by co-operative methods which would be impossible for individuals. The main thing is to decide on the best way of treating the area library resources as a single whole—always bearing in mind that industrial libraries, for example, may require to restrict the use of some of their material to their own staff. Such details have no effect on the general conception, which is to increase deliberately the inter-dependence of the various units so that each gains from the stock and experience of the others while giving them the benefit of its own.

It is not only within the existing framework of the public library set-up that improvements may be visualised.

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The main thesis advanced here has been that the request service is the central point of the library's activities, and that all other sections should be geared to it, rather than to the issue counter, which is held to be merely a mechanical contrivance for locating any loaned book at a given time—no more. To make the counter the hub of the room is to reduce the whole quality of the lending library to its level, as has been realised by the users. There have been many suggestions for altering this, but once again they seem to have been made often without considering why they have become necessary.

For example, it is realised that a good case can be made for removing the issue counter from the lending library altogether, and this will be even more advisable when mechanical charging becomes the rule. But there has been little progress from this, to replace it as the focal point by the request service desk, except in isolated cases. In other words, this is not explicitly stated to be part of the development of the public library, changing its form in order to fulfil a new function in accordance with the needs of the community. It is a local improvement.

It is clear from the literature, however, that some librarians are beginning to re-think the planning of the public library on a basis of service to readers. Division into subject sections, already practised in the United States, finds a staunch advocate, not only in Savage, but in a much younger member of the profession, in a prize-winning essay.¹ A comprehensive description has been given of a new form of layout based on recognition of the subject approach.² Reading is divided into "purposive" and "non-purposive", and a plan is shown of a

¹ Smith, G. E., *Library Assistant*, Vol. 42, 1949, p. 53.

² McClellan, A. W., *Library World*, Vol. 52, 1950, p. 183.

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theoretical library based on "service in depth", with "relaxing" literature separate from "specific", and all the library services, including classifying and cataloguing, grouped round the request service counter. The issue and return point is outside the library, at its entrance.

A similar idea has been reported from a library which was reconstructed after the war.³ Once again, the issue point is at the entrance, with the layout centred on the Enquiry Desk, to which all enquiries are directed. Senior staff are always on duty, and the Desk backs on to the processing room, thus giving the assistant-in-charge the ability to switch staff from one point to another at a moment. This effects a great economy in the use of the staff, who only need to be at the issue point in force at infrequent intervals. It is emphasised that a single assistant can handle all the traffic for the greater part of the time. This is, of course, because they do not have to leave their post in order to give attention to readers' requests, which is what makes it necessary to have more than one assistant in the average lending library.

It is possible that many other developments of a like nature are being held up by the present obstacles to rebuilding. Most of the older systems are burdened with buildings that were planned before the subject approach with its implications for reference service was ever contemplated in public libraries, and it will doubtless be many years before it will be possible to put up a new building for the only reason that the old one is out of date.

That does not mean to say, however, that all attempts to foresee new ways of planning should also be shelved.

³ Reynolds, J. D., *Library Association Record*, Vol. 52, 1950, p. 146.

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The descriptions of new branches that appear from time to time in the *Library Association Record* do not show many examples of the move to develop organised assistance to readers in them. Yet, as has been constantly pointed out, there is absolutely no reason why branches as well as central libraries should not be planned along these lines; the main feature of the organisation is that it makes a good personal service possible at every point. Decentralisation of service need not involve dissipation of resources if the stock is always viewed as a whole and there are adequate means provided for inter-branch loans.

A library exists where there are books, readers and staff. The job of the librarian, it has often been said, is to bring the other two elements of this trinity together, but this cannot be done without a study of the way in which knowledge is sought and the ways in which it can be made available through books and libraries. The public library, in particular, is a social institution provided by the people for their own benefit, and the task of the staff is therefore a social one. Most people do not yet realise the potentialities of libraries as a source of increased happiness derived from increased mastery over their environment. Even those who do, have not the opportunity of reading everything that could benefit them in the mass of material now being published.

If librarians accept the responsibility which this implies for them, there can be no doubt that the profession will in time become one of the most important of all. The opportunity must be grasped, before the need becomes so urgent that another, new, type of worker with books arises, to push librarians back into keepership. But in order to fulfil a social function in a highly-civilised and

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therefore highly-organised society, the library itself must have an organisation that can be relied on to take care of all the mechanical processes, leaving the librarian free to know his books and his readers, and to devote his energies to bringing them together.



APPENDIX I

COSTS

IN ORDER to give some idea of the actual costs involved, the following estimate can be taken as applying to a system of some 140,000 books, serving a population of about the same number, and consisting of a central library and three full-time branches.

Central Library.

| | |
|--|-------|
| Librarian-in-charge (Grade IV) | £ 480 |
| Assistant (Grade II) | 420 |
| Postal Charges | |
| Regional Bureau | 35 |
| Letters, etc. | 35 |
| Stationery | |
| Forms (pads of 50) | 50 |
| Other | 10 |
| | _____ |
| | £1030 |
| | _____ |

Branch Library.

| | |
|--|-------|
| Librarian-in-charge (Grade II) | £ 420 |
| Assistant (Grade I, half-time) | 200 |
| Postal Charges | |
| Letters | 8 |
| Stationery | |
| Forms | 15 |
| Other | 2 |
| | _____ |
| | £ 645 |
| | _____ |

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This can, of course, be only an approximation to the overall cost. But it must not be thought that these costs are all extra; if they were, it would indeed be a formidable total. Against these totals must be set several existing charges which would not occur with an organisation like this.

- (1) Most libraries already make use of the Regional Bureau, even if not to the extent of the figure quoted, £35. For this reason, the subscription has not been included. And since the use of the scheme is much greater, its cost per volume becomes much less; that is, its cost *per satisfied reader*, which is all that matters, decreases considerably.
- (2) Certain postal charges exist, in notification of reserves, suggestions and Bureau loans. These are all included in the figures quoted, so that the amount *extra* would be less than appears in the table.
- (3) Since the stationery is designed to cover all services, items which already exist, such as reserves forms, suggestions books of forms, inter-branch requisitions, and readers' notifications, will all disappear, and their present cost should therefore be subtracted.
- (4) All requests are routed through the same service desk, and thus it will not be necessary to provide a large number of issue counter staff. Nor will there be any necessity for other than juniors to work on the counter, so that in most cases the *addition* to the salary costs will be less than the figure shown.

APPENDIX II

EXAMPLES

AS IT IS difficult to convey an accurate impression of this kind of personal service by description only, a few examples of satisfied requests are given. It is hoped that these will illustrate the procedure, and at the same time give an indication of some useful sources and some common difficulties.

Example 1.

A request for "a book on dressmaking".

Classified at "Dressmaking" (I 560), and the shelves searched at that place. There were no books on the shelf, but two or three were available on "pattern-cutting" (I 561). This was reported to the reader, who then explained that pattern-cutting was what she really wanted.

This illustrates how important it is to establish what the reader requires, as exactly as possible, *before* beginning any action. In this case, as it happened, no time had been wasted, and a small profit shown, as it impressed this rule on the mind of the assistant!

Example 2.

A book on refrigeration in the dairy industry was required by an engineer who was going for an interview for a new post. The request was taken at a branch. The classification scheme gave only the general head

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"Refrigeration" (C 246), and at that place were found some general works which were not very helpful. The Union catalogue showed several more, but again was not helpful as it was not annotated. Bibliographies at the branch were checked without success.

Telephone calls to two leading journals and a professional institute were made; all suggested the same book, which was in stock at the Central library, but was not very full. This was given to the reader as a stop-gap, and the request passed to the Central library. There, a check of the Reference Library shelves gave *Commercial Refrigeration*, by L. K. Wright, published in the U.S.A. in 1936; chapters 5 to 9 deal extensively with the dairy industries.

This shows that Union catalogues should not be confined to lending library stock, and also that annotations are of vital importance, if the classification scheme does not allow sufficiently close classifying to show accurately the subject of the book. In the case of a general work, as here, an analytical entry could have been made for what was a considerable portion of the work.

Example 3.

Information on "Mary Jones of Bala" especially in relation to her request for a Bible in Welsh.

Nothing traced in the library stock or bibliographies; nothing given in general sources such as *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Hastings, *DNB*, etc. Letters to two theological libraries also brought no result. "Mary Jones" was known to be connected with the British and Foreign Bible Society, and a letter to them brought the donation of a book, *Mary Jones of Bala and her Bible*, by Mary Carter, published by the Society in 1949, and a small pamphlet

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of the same title. The book satisfied the reader completely.

This shows how it is possible to under-estimate or overlook the resources of an organisation which has a "ready-made" answer when more august sources fail.

Example 4.

Music engraving and printing. The reader was aware of the traditional methods, and felt sure that very little had changed or been written about for the last 30 years. He wanted either confirmation of this or information on recent changes, but was not concerned with photographic reproduction in any form.

Very little was traced in the library stock, and nothing of value in the bibliographies. It was known that *Music engraving and printing*, by W. Gamble, published in 1922, still ranked as a standard work. A telephone call to the British Federation of Master Printers brought confirmation of Gamble and reference to a series of four articles in the journal *Printing Equipment Engineer* for October 1949 to January 1950. A telephone call to St. Bride's Institute confirmed that there was little literature on the subject and brought references to the above articles, a short chapter in *Practical printing and binding*, by H. Whetton, two German periodical articles, and a lecture given by J. N. Green at Stationers' Hall on the 9th of December, 1927.

Example 5.

American Indian unrest of c. 1860, particularly in the Sioux tribe, and the Dawes Act, 1887. The reader insisted on a popular account in one book, giving a fairly complete coverage, suitable for a school project.

Nothing traced in the library stock apart from a few

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references in works on American political, social and legal history, and in encyclopedias. The text of the Dawes Act was found. CBI and U.S. Catalogue produced only works of too general or too specific a nature, for example the Sioux tribe in a certain place at a certain time. The Regional Bureau supplied a title which proved on inspection to be unsatisfactory. Sonnenschein suggested a work which indicated general and popular coverage: *The Training of the Sioux*, by F. B. Fiske, 1917. This was obtained through the Bureau and proved quite suitable.

Example 6.

The deaf and dumb: their particular problems in education and educational facilities, etc., especially from the point of view of the patient. The reader was deaf and dumb, and in addition to reading material, wanted names and societies catering for this class.

The lending library stock gave nothing very specific, but the reference library gave the names of three associations and the "Library for the education of the deaf" at Manchester University. Several very useful works were borrowed from H. K. Lewis' Library, and the Manchester library placed their resources at the reader's disposal through the public library. Gallanact College, Washington, D.C., U.S.A., provided a world list of schools for the deaf, with brief notes on any special activities.

Example 7.

Advanced mathematical topology. The reader wanted either a book on this subject or contact with a source

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which would lead to confirmation of certain aspects of his work.

It was recognised that this query was of a very advanced and specialised nature, and when reference to stock, bibliographies and the Regional Bureau had been made without success, a letter was sent to the library of the London Mathematical Society. By this means the reader was put in touch with an expert in his field.

Example 8.

France: "L'éducation nouvelle".

A bibliography was required, and when reference to sources at hand yielded only a few items, a letter was sent to the National Union of Teachers, who supplied a bibliography containing among other items an extensive bibliography issued by the Ministère de l'éducation nationale.

Example 9.

Gold block work: materials, processes, machine technique; details required of current practice, and names of firms.

A letter to the Boot, Shoe and Allied Trade Research Association brought information on the general process and the names of five firms specialising in the machinery used for this work.

Example 10.

Intarsia and marquetry. Practical instruction was wanted, especially on intarsia work. The reader was convinced, and at some pains to point out, that marquetry was quite different from intarsia, and was not a development of it.

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An extensive check in several books proved that marquetry was in fact a later elaboration of intarsia; e.g. *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1945, under "inlaying" or "marquetry". The lending library provided *Modern cabinet work*, by P. A. Wells and J. Hooper, 1938, which gave several further references, and some practical instructions in Volume IV of *The Practical Woodworker*, edited by B. E. Jones. Other references were also obtained by telephoning the Victoria and Albert Museum and the journal *The Woodworker*.

Example 11.

Information on the triangle of force.

The assistant did not know what this was, but referred to the classification schedules under "Force", found a class number and consulted the shelves at that point. Reference to the indexes of books classed at and about that number soon provided several pages, to the complete satisfaction of the reader.

This illustrates the importance of an ability to use the classification, as well as the books themselves. It is thus part of the most essential skill of a librarian, since by enabling him to place a request in its correct field of knowledge, it results in a more efficient reference service, with increased benefit to the readers.

Example 12.

A bookseller asked for assistance in tracing a work on biology for medical students for which he had been asked. It was known that this was not its title; the subject was a combination of biology and medicine; it was published early in 1950 and cost 25/-. Author, title and publisher were unknown.

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The assistant consulted the index to the *British National Bibliography* under Biology. The number given was 570, and there was no special reference to works biased towards medicine. At 570 in the table was found *Biology: an introduction to medical and other studies*, by P. D. F. Murray. This was published at 25/- in March 1950, and proved to be the work required.

This is a very simple example, but it does illustrate that with a classified guide, it is not necessary to have details of author, title, or publisher to trace a work of which the subject is known. Since most such works are asked for by their subject, an apparently obscure request need actually present no difficulty.





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